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# AMERICAN ATHEIST

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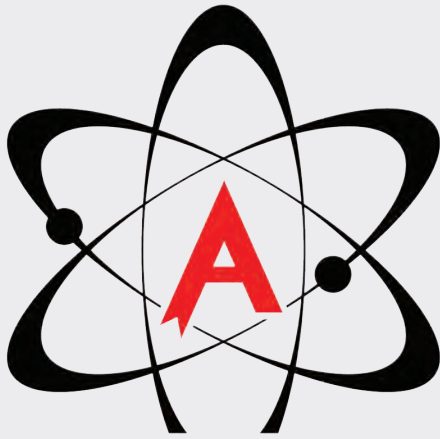
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On the cover is an artist's rendering of Boy Scout merit badges that don't exist. 1. Humanist symbol. 2. Flying Spaghetti Monster 3. "Darwin fish" evolution symbol 4. Camp Quest logo 5. American Atheists logo 6. Gay pride flag 7. Out Campaign scarlet A

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American Atheists has launched *AtheistVoter.com* in the run up to the 2016 election season.

## *The Tenets of Atheism and Democracy are the Same*

Both are born of the idea that there is neither a deity nor a monarch with the answers to all of life's questions, no final arbiter of right and wrong who will steer us in the proper direction if we just listen closely enough—and then obey. Atheist communities and functioning democracies both rely on the belief that people can and should govern themselves, and, at the end of the day, all we have is each other and our mutual tolerance. That's why a democracy cannot function properly if it is not secular, and it cannot function at all if its eligible citizens don't vote.

The Pew Research Center estimates that just twelve percent of 2014 voters were “nones,” which describes people with no religious preference. Yet more than fifteen million people—twenty percent of the U.S. population—are nonreligious, and the Atheist voting bloc is getting larger every year with the number of religiously unaffiliated voters continuing to grow and more than a third of younger Millennials reporting no religious preference.

American Atheists has launched *AtheistVoter.com* in the run up to the 2016 election season. Through the *AtheistVoter* campaign, we are calling on Atheists throughout the country to engage with political candidates, elected officials, and members of the media about issues relating to the separation of religion and government.

With *AtheistVoter*, we can ensure that elected officials know that Atheists, agnostics, and other nonreligious constituents vote in huge numbers, so they can no longer simply ignore us or take our votes for granted.

The effects of religion in public policy are apparent at every level of government, from anti-LGBT

discrimination to restricting the healthcare choices of women, from preferential treatment for churches and religious groups in the tax code to the excuse of “it's tradition” for allowing Christian ideology to remain part of everyday government practices.

Policies rooted in religious bigotry and theology attack the fundamental rights of the nonreligious and all of our fellow citizens. History has shown us that the only way to change the political dialogue is to show elected officials the value of our votes.

*AtheistVoter.com* is a one-stop resource to equip and encourage Atheists to engage directly with candidates about church/state separation and Atheist equality. At *AtheistVoter.com* you can find campaign events near you and track candidates' positions on issues important to Atheists. We also provide sample questions to ask candidates, including how they would best represent Atheists and whether they support the separation of religion and government.

The most current voter registration information and state-by-state information about deadlines, identification requirements, and early voting is also available on the website.

Please take one minute each day between now and Election Day 2016 to tweet (#*AtheistVoter*) or email one of your elected officials, and let them know that you are an Atheist who will be voting. Let them know you are an active constituent, and that it's time they start listening to their nonreligious, equality-demanding, secular constituents.

Exercising the right to vote is the only way we can change our government for the better.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "PWhissel".

Pamela Whissel  
Editor-in-Chief  
PWhissel@Atheists.org





# Marriage Equality is Here and the Sky Hasn't Fallen

by J.T. Eberhard

**W**henever a court decision or an act of Congress results in gay people getting treated a little less poorly, a third certainty (along with death and taxes) rears its ugly head. Religious people, most of whom purport to follow a religion of love, will scream about how treating others decently will somehow result in a world beyond anything Orwell could have conceived.

Remember when we were on the brink of nixing the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in our military? Oh, was there was fear-mongering. It would be the end of military cohesion! The end of freedom! Yes, soldiers are able to endure sweltering conditions away from their families, bullets whizzing by their heads, and even the trauma of perhaps having to kill another human being. But the presence of a gay person would be too much of a distraction. That’s how little these people think of our soldiers.

Somehow, we’ve survived. We were told that the idea that nobody is too gay to fight for their country would kill the military’s recruiting efforts. We were warned of a mass exodus if members of the military were forced to serve next to gay people not shamed into the closet. None of it happened. The death of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was a non-event, the uproar nothing more than paranoid, unsupported, homophobic bluster. What’s even more shameful is that none of the fear-mongers have had the integrity to say, “Oops, our bad.”

Now that the Supreme Court has ensured marriage equality in every state, those same people are at it again. It’ll be the end of the family, the end of the world! Matt Barber from the Liberty Counsel compared the ruling to 9/11. Apparently, gay people making each other happy is a travesty akin to thousands of people dying in a terrorist attack. Peter LaBarbera from Americans for Truth About Homosexuality (an organization which, ironically, devotes almost all of its time to lying about homosexuality) said that same-sex relationships are a destructive offense to god, and we’ll be sure to see why in the coming days. Franklin Graham called it a slap in the face to most Americans and suggested that god will strike the White House with lightning. Pastor Rick Wiles encouraged people to flee the country to escape god’s wrath. Mike Huckabee demonstrated his ignorance of how executive orders work by saying he would use them to fight the ruling if he were elected president. Pastor Douglas Wilson said same-sex marriage will be worse for America than slavery.

Well guys, we’ve heard this sky-is-falling routine before. You

have been crying wolf from the middle of a metropolis in a part of the world with no wolf population. And don’t you worry about families, because they’re going to be just fine, and there will now be even more of them. The foundation of a family is love, which is why households with parents beholden to opposing genitalia but absent love are still dysfunctional. What’s more, how can loving and nurturing a family destroy the foundation of family life? That’s like fighting ants by emptying a box of donuts onto the floor.

## *The right to define marriage within your church remains as solid as ever.*

You keep insisting that you hold the keys to marriage, as if every non-Christian person tying the knot has no say in the matter, and they’re just dipping into a religion to which they don’t subscribe because...I don’t know, you all never say. You don’t own marriage, and you never have.

What you do still own—and will continue to own—is the narrow definition by which members of your church can be wed. Your right to define marriage within your church remains as solid as ever. In its ruling, the Supreme Court has made that perfectly clear: “Finally, it must be emphasized that religions, and those who adhere to religious doctrines, may continue to advocate with utmost, sincere conviction that, by divine precepts, same-sex marriage should not be condoned. The First Amendment ensures that religious organizations and persons are given proper protection as they seek to teach the principles that are so fulfilling and so central to their lives and faiths, and to their own deep aspirations to continue the family structure they have long revered.”

Now stop pretending that a secular government is your enemy.

---

J.T.’s blog, What Would J.T. Do?, is at [Patheos.com/blogs/WWJTD](http://Patheos.com/blogs/WWJTD). He previously worked for the Secular Student Alliance, where he was their first high-school organizer. He is the co-founder of the Skepticon conference and served as the event’s lead organizer for its first three years.

## *How can loving and nurturing a family destroy the foundation of family life?*

# The Real Story

from an  
**Ex-Mormon Missionary**

## Part Three

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by Greg Hawkins

**T**his is the third installment of our six-part series by Greg Hawkins, a former Mormon who was a missionary in the Philippines. In these articles, he describes what goes on when missionaries (they always travel in pairs) knock on your door, and you let them in. He's also giving a side of the story that the missionaries may leave out or may not even be aware of in the first place. A missionary's training includes only whitewashed, disinfected talking points, and they are taught to stick to the script. They are unprepared to deal with any meaningful or intelligent deviation. For example, in order to be in good standing, a Mormon is *required* to tithe, or give ten percent of their income to the church for their entire lives. This applies to everyone, even if you live in poverty or you are raising a large family or if you have enormous debt.

It's possible that by questioning a missionary in an amiable, non-confrontational way, you'll give them a real opportunity to apply critical thinking to their religion's harmful absurdities, like non-negotiable tithing. And it may be the first time in their lives that they've ever been asked to do so.





In the previous article, I talked about the The Plan of Salvation, which is the second lesson that will be taught to you if you invite a missionary back into your home after completing Lesson One. Lesson Two gives the answers to the questions “where did we come from, why are we here on Earth, and where are we going after this life?” I also explained how the Mormon model of the afterlife differs from the mainstream Christian view of heaven and hell, including the reduced status in the afterlife for gay, lesbian, transgender, and other non-binary individuals.

It usually takes one or two meetings to cover each lesson. If the investigator (the person taking the lessons) shows substantial progress after a few meetings, they are considered a “progressing investigator”—someone likely to accept an invitation to be baptized. (Missionaries primarily work with potential converts to the church. But they sometimes teach “less active members,” which is the term that describes Mormons who have lapsed in regular church attendance.) It’s during Lesson Three, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ,” that the missionaries intensify the pressure on an investigator to accept an invitation to baptism.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has five parts: Faith in Jesus Christ, Repentance, Baptism, The Gift of the Holy Ghost, and Endure to the End. Mormonism teaches that after this life, everyone will be judged by the Lord. And while the Lord will judge us with as much mercy as possible, he never violates the sacred law of justice. And the only way justice can be satisfied to allow for mercy is through Jesus Christ’s atonement and resurrection. In return for Jesus atoning for our sins, we must take responsibility for our actions by following the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### Faith in Jesus Christ

Faith is the most important of all the principles required to successfully return to Heavenly Father after death. Mormons believe we can have faith by choosing to believe in doctrines that have no evidence or support, like the Mormon Word of Wisdom Doctrine, which, among other things, forbids drinking coffee and tea. Faith can also be strengthened by obeying the teachings of the LDS Church. Sufficient faith leads to miracles. According to the official Mormon missionary textbook, *Preach My Gospel*, “As we obey God, He blesses us. He gives us power to meet life’s challenges. He helps us change the desires of our hearts. Through our faith in Jesus Christ, He can heal us, both physically and spiritually.” The Mormon Church teaches that faith healing is a good idea. Some members even shun modern medicine in favor of “priesthood blessings” specifically because of this teaching.

After the atonement of Jesus Christ, the most important doctrine we must accept on faith in the LDS Church is the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, which is problematic in that it’s completely circular. In order to know whether the Book of Mormon is true, we must read it and pray about it. We

will then receive a confirmation through the Holy Ghost (often described by members as a “burning in the bosom”) of the book’s truthfulness. We know that a burning in the bosom is a valid method of determining truth because the Book of Mormon says so. In some cases faith is benign, but the ramifications of unsubstantiated belief often lead to incredibly bad things like faith-healing, extended fasting, and the suppression of homosexual thoughts and feelings.

### Repentance

Missionaries will continually focus on repentance to ensure that investigators remain “spiritually worthy” during the conversion process. According to *Preach My Gospel*, “When we repent, we feel godly sorrow, then we stop doing things that are wrong and continue doing things that are right. Bringing our lives in line with God’s will through repentance is a central purpose of our lives. We can return to live with God the Father only through Christ’s mercy, and we receive Christ’s mercy only on condition of repentance.”

One major problem is that repentance assumes which actions are “right” and which actions are “wrong.” This is completely relative in Christianity, and even more so in Mormonism, where each prophet (the person ordained directly by God to lead the church on Earth and to speak and act in his name at the highest level) has the power and authority to nullify or minimize past declarations or doctrines.

Drinking coffee, watching R-rated movies, and shopping on Sunday are all “wrong.” Premarital sex is more than “wrong.” Sexual transgressions are, after murder, the most wicked thing we can do on Earth. But killing someone to fulfill the will of God is “right.” Even today, while most members would shun the thought of killing another human being, many members believe that killing for the gospel may have once been a necessary act of faith. This says a lot about the morality of Heavenly Father.

Polygamy was “right” until 1890. Blood atonement, or killing someone for apostasy (which is different from killing because God ordered it), was “right” under Brigham Young’s leadership until at least 1877. Belief that black people are spiritually inferior to white people was “right” until 1978.

These beliefs, doctrines, and practices lead to a direct increase in human suffering, but missionaries will claim to have the moral high ground because their church defines “right” and “wrong” for them. Ethics and morality have much more to do with following arbitrary rules than with maximizing positive human values.

### Baptism

During Lesson Three, the missionary may extend this invitation to get baptized: “Brother/Sister [your last name here], will you follow the example of Jesus Christ and be baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by someone holding the proper priesthood authority?” If the invitation is

***To be in good standing, a Mormon must give ten percent of their income to the church. This applies to everyone, even if you live in poverty.***

# ***Drinking coffee, watching R-rated movies, and shopping on Sunday are all “wrong.” But killing someone to fulfill the will of God is “right.”***

accepted, a baptismal date will be set for the near future.

*Preach My Gospel* states, “Jesus taught that we must be baptized by immersion for the remission, or forgiveness, of our sins. Baptism is an essential ordinance of salvation. No person can enter the kingdom of God without being baptized.”

The LDS Church was caught up in a slew of negative publicity in 2012 over posthumously baptizing Holocaust victims by proxy. These Baptisms for the Dead are not meant to be disrespectful; Mormons just think that their baptisms are the only valid ones. This is how it works: Someone dies without being baptized in the LDS Church. Another person, an active and temple-worthy Mormon, goes to the temple on behalf of the dead person and is baptized by being totally immersed in a pool of water, just as they were at their own baptism. Many Mormons will ask to be baptized on behalf of their deceased relatives. By baptizing everyone, they are, in essence, inviting people to join the party. They are not forcing people to join the party, nor are they claiming that people will actually join the party, but while baptizing victims of the Holocaust (and their Nazi guards, captors, and enemies) without the permission of their posterity is definitely offensive, Mormonism views this ordinance, or sacred ceremony, as a necessary act for anyone wishing to enter the Kingdom of God.

## **The Gift of the Holy Ghost**

Bestowing of the Gift of the Holy Ghost is the second ordinance necessary to enter the Kingdom of God. After a Mormon is “born of water” through baptism, they will be “born of the Spirit” through the Gift of the Holy Ghost. This happens when one or more holders of the priesthood lay their hands on your head and recite the words of the sacred ordinance. According to *Preach My Gospel*, “The Holy Ghost testifies of Christ and helps us recognize the truth. He provides spiritual strength and helps us do what is right. He comforts us during times of trial or sorrow. He warns us of spiritual or physical danger. The Holy Ghost provides the power by which we teach and learn. The gift of the Holy Ghost is one of our Heavenly Father’s most precious gifts. Through the power of the Holy Ghost we can feel God’s love and direction for us.”

Feeling the presence of the Holy Ghost is the Mormon indicator for deciding whether something is right or wrong. Say a Mormon walks into a bar. Since she isn’t allowed to drink alcohol, she will feel the “promptings” of the Holy Ghost in her heart *if she’s listening*. These promptings may tell her to exit the bar, they may tell her to complete her business there as quickly as possible, or they may tell her something entirely different. Everyone has a conscience, or the “light of Christ,” but only baptized Mormons who have (1) received the Gift of the Holy Ghost and (2) are living “worthily” will have this great, holy, moral arbiter tell them what decisions to make 24/7. The Holy Ghost often returned

false positives to me when I was a Mormon, but I just chalked it up to the need to have more faith or to live a more pious life.

The LDS Church constantly refers to the Holy Ghost to manipulate the lives of members and investigators. The Holy Ghost didn’t comfort you when your brother died? You must not be fully living by church standards. You didn’t feel the Holy Ghost testify that Mormonism is true when you prayed? You need more faith. The Holy Ghost told you and your missionary companion to knock on a specific door, but nobody was home? You misread the Holy Ghost’s still, small voice.

## **Endure to the End**

A Mormon’s responsibility to stay on the “straight and narrow path” is known as “enduring to the end.” According to *Preach My Gospel*, this is accomplished by “continually exercising faith in Jesus Christ, repenting, making commitments, and following the Spirit.”

This is where I failed in following the Gospel of Jesus Christ. By doubting the faith, I just didn’t endure. “Enduring to the end” is a lifelong commitment to the LDS Church, which requires a lot of its members. Members are required to pay tithing, visit other members for spiritual edification (known as “home teaching” or “visiting teaching”), serve missions, attend the temple, attend worship services for three hours every Sunday, and watch the General Conference, to name just a few. My next article will take a closer look at these commandments.

But what if enduring to the end is simply too difficult? What if we have unanswered questions? What if we are beginning to doubt everything? What if we discover the horrifying facts about the actions of church founder Joseph Smith or his successor Brigham Young?

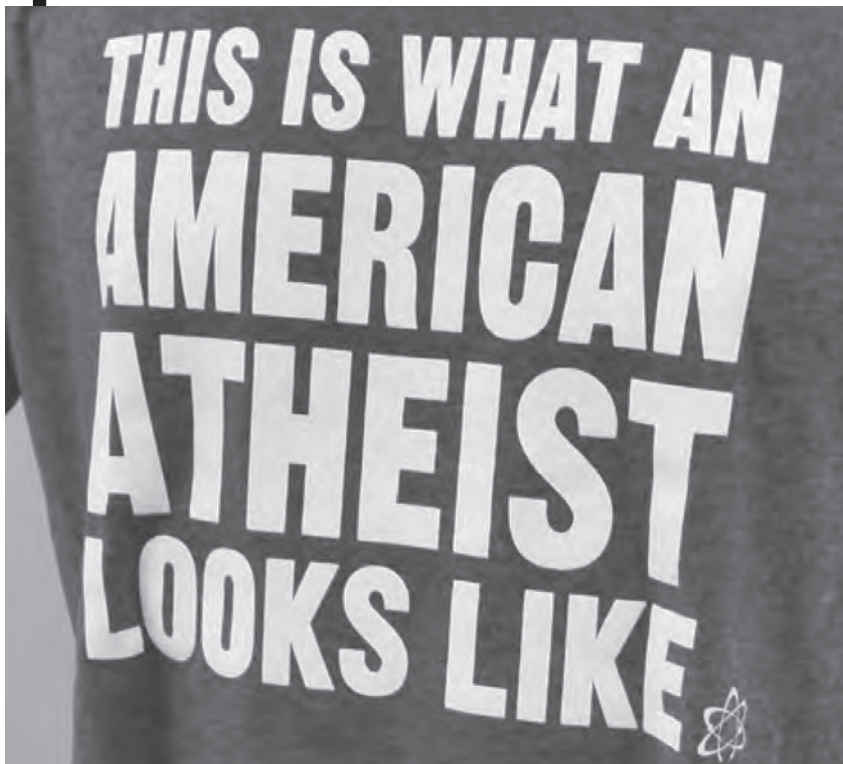
President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency of the Church said this in his October 2013 General Conference talk: “We openly acknowledge that in nearly 200 years of church history—along with an uninterrupted line of inspired, honorable, and divine events—there have been some things said and done that could cause people to question... Sometimes questions arise because we simply don’t have all the information and we just need a bit more patience. When the entire truth is eventually known, things that didn’t make sense to us before will be resolved to our satisfaction.”

Sometimes we just need to believe a little harder. Sometimes we just need more faith.

## **In the next issue: Lesson Four, The Commandments**

Greg Hawkins served as a full-time Mormon missionary before renouncing his faith in 2013. He studies political science at the University of Utah. His freelance work can be found at BroadClarity.com.





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## PARENTING WITHOUT GOD

How To Raise Moral, Ethical  
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Dan Arel  
FOREWORD BY PETER BOGHOSSIAN

*“Parenting Without God” is not just about the absence of religion—it’s about the glorious space that opens up for secular parents and their lucky kids once the clutter and smoke of religion is gone. Dan Arel’s voice is clear, smart, and a welcome addition to the growing chorus of parents taking the hands of their children and running at full speed into the real world.”*

~ Dale McGowan, author/editor, *Parenting Beyond Belief* and *Raising Freethinkers*

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# Toward a New Definition of **ATHEISM**

by Hank Fox



Some of the 20,000 Reason Rally attendees, Washington, D.C., 2012

**S**ooner rather than later, every fledgling Atheist gets swept up in the definitional debate. Atheism is this, Atheism is that, agnosticism is the other thing, and one disturbingly insistent assertion pops up in every iteration: “You can’t prove a negative! It’s impossible!”

I always joke that I *can* prove a negative — that gods don’t exist — but the proof only works with someone who’s already open-minded. In my book, *Red Neck, Blue Collar Atheist: Simple Thoughts About Reason, Gods & Faith*, I undertake to prove one particular negative: that Batman doesn’t exist. Given the definition of Batman — a guy who lives in Gotham City on Earth, who has a butler named Alfred and a protege named Dick Grayson, a man who is himself billionaire industrialist Bruce Wayne and who swings around the streets of the city night after night chasing criminals — he doesn’t and can’t exist. Since the very definition of Batman provides that he lives in Gotham City, a city which doesn’t exist on Earth (*Don’t* give me crap about that. Batman originated in 1939; all that “infinite Earths”

stuff came up only in the 1980s.), Batman — *the* Batman, not just some “bat man” you might make up in your own head — does not and cannot possibly exist anywhere in the universe.

All the evidence points to Batman’s non-existence. In the case of the fictional character Batman, we know the name of the man who created him: Bob Kane. We know the names of the many actors — Adam West, Michael Keaton, Val Kilmer, George Clooney, Christian Bale, etc. — who have portrayed him in movies and animated features. If you asked any of those people if Batman is real, they might joke about it, but I doubt any of them would take the question seriously because they know they were portraying a man who is non-existent.

Plus, you know, *fictional character*.

So, in fact, you can prove a negative, under certain conditions. This type of proof is argumentatively ineffective against god because “god” is never defined in any concrete way. The concept of god probably even evolved toward a non-concrete definition so as to stave off questions about its provability.

Still, this business about the impossibility of proving a negative crops up in every discussion, over and over,

## ***The concept of god probably evolved toward a non-concrete***



# ***If you understand Atheism as a thought experiment, you can confidently call yourself an enthusiastic, fully engaged, 100-percent Atheist.***

with debaters slinging it out in perfect confidence at every opportunity. “If you don’t search the entire universe, you can’t prove that something doesn’t exist! It’s logically impossible! Therefore, you can’t be 100-percent Atheist!”

I often come across online postings of the Dawkins Scale, which asks the question, “Where do you stand?” I’m one of the few who answers that I’m a 100-percent, Level 7, “Strong Atheist.” Inevitably, the stated reservation of many others is that you can’t prove a negative because you can’t *know* with 100-percent certainty that a thing doesn’t exist. There’s always that 0.000000000000001-percent possibility that the thing might exist out there somewhere. Therefore, it’s logically offensive to state that you’re a Level 7 Atheist.

But given the argued one-trillionth-of-a-percent possibility, you’re not talking about a God of the Gaps. This is a god diluted to homeopathic levels — a long, long way from the full-strength supposed Creator of the Universe. Just as homeopathy is ignorable, so is such an iffy god.

Yet, the persistence of the argument that you have to *know* there’s no God or gods to call yourself an Atheist, and you can’t, so you shouldn’t — as well as the confidence of those stating it — is a source of perpetual annoyance. It is especially so, given the fact that the concept of god was fairly obviously — to a non-religious person, anyway — made up by humans. You can sometimes observe the process in real time if you get into an argument about the nature of god with a religious person who usually has to make up fresh assertions on the spot.

There’s a way out of the problem, it seems to me, by side-stepping the seemingly reasonable argument and redefining “Atheism” to mean something slightly different. Something not just defensible, but inarguable and, fortunately, something it already means, but just below the level of notice.

Germane to this discussion, there’s this thing we humans started doing not too many hundreds of years ago. We call it “science.” And rather than something that needed to be logically “proved,” science was a philosophy, an outlook, a way of viewing the world around us.

Distinguishing itself from earlier ways of thinking — which included gods, devils, heaven and hell, supernatural powers, and personages — science isn’t a logical argument; it’s a thought experiment. Up until that time, we’d had the definitive assertion of all these supernatural powers. Then we had this other idea, not so much the definite statement that those supernatural thingies didn’t exist, but the attempt to see what things might be like *if they didn’t*.

Science is the thought experiment that asks, “What if there are no supernatural forces at all? What if the world and the universe around us operate solely by real-world, natural forces?”

What would geology look like if there were no all-powerful god to set it all up just so? What would physics or astronomy be like if there were no supernatural will involved? What would

weather look like without evil and benign spirits (or, according to some sources, gay marriage) affecting it? How does biology work in the absence of a capricious, unknowable creator? All too obviously, science became an especially fruitful way of seeing things. Modern civilization, and pretty much everything in it, is the result. Instead of taking up the argument regarding the non-existence of gods, science just goes about exploring, experimenting, examining, *as if* there were no supernatural forces at work.

Atheism, if we want to see it like this, is that same endeavor. Scaled down to personal-philosophy size, it is the thought experiment of seeing the world, of conducting our lives in it, as if there were no such things as gods.

What if there is no heaven and hell, no holy telepath glaring down into our thoughts and actions to see which fate we deserve? How do we understand generosity, charity, decency, moral rightness?

What if the churchly billions are mistaken about all this god business? How do we know how to celebrate holidays or which holidays to celebrate? How do we educate our kids? How do we welcome newborns or mourn the departed?

What if there is no holy-book guide to all of life? How do we figure out what to do, how to live, how to treat each other, what sorts of things we’re allowed to eat or touch, whether we can perform work on Saturday or not?

Atheism can be precisely that. Not so much the assertion that God or gods don’t exist, but the ongoing thought experiment of asking, “What if they don’t?”

In that case, we don’t have to waffle and nitpick about minuscule possibilities. We don’t have to argue about remotely conceivable personages hiding out in a vast universe. We don’t have to prove or verify anything. We just have to say, “I’m choosing to try this thought experiment. For the rest of my life, I will assume there are no supernatural super-beings anywhere in the universe and see what there is to gain from that.”

If you understand Atheism as a thought experiment, you can confidently call yourself an enthusiastic, fully engaged, 100-percent Atheist. Every one of us can be a 7 on the Dawkins Scale.

The powerfully positive outcome of the thought experiment of science compared to the millennia-long, pre-science era when we tried that other mode of thought, religion and superstition — which is transparently also a thought experiment — suggests there’s a great deal to gain, both as individuals and as a worldwide society, by simply choosing to be full Atheists and following through in every part of life.

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## ***definition so as to stave off questions about its provability.***

# Meaning and Purpose *with NO GOD REQUIRED*

by Gleb Tsipursky, Ph.D.

**I**s god the key to meaning and purpose in life? It seems that way if we trust mainstream opinions typically presented in the media and in bestselling books such as Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*. Moreover, there is some scientific support for that viewpoint. Plenty of studies show that a deep sense of meaning and purpose correlates with strong religious belief, and religious fundamentalists use these studies to support their perspective.

As a professor who researches the intersection of psychology and history, including life-meaning and purpose, I was very surprised when I first learned about these studies. I found their conclusions hard to believe. So I started digging deeper into the data and found a much more complex story. I want to share my findings with you and tell you what the research actually says about how we, as reason-oriented, secular people can use a science-informed approach to gain a deep sense of purpose with no god required.



***Secular people can use a science-informed approach***



Let's take a look at some studies which indicate that religion correlates with a strong sense of life-meaning. A case study of the population of Memphis found that when religion played an important role in someone's life, they had a heightened sense of life-meaning and purpose.<sup>1</sup> A nationwide study found that those who had more confidence in god had a higher sense of life-meaning and purpose compared to doubters and nonbelievers.<sup>2</sup> Global studies found similar outcomes.<sup>3,4</sup>

However, after I read these studies carefully and took in all of the information, some questions arose in my mind. For example, forms of worship which don't promote social connectedness do not correlate with a heightened sense of satisfaction or meaning in life. One study showed that affiliation with a religion practiced in a communal setting leads to a higher degree of life-satisfaction than when religious devotion is practiced in private settings.<sup>5</sup> Another investigation also found that deeply personal religion, as opposed to group-oriented religion, did not correlate with a greater sense of happiness and life-meaning.<sup>6</sup>

These results should give pause to any intellectually honest person examining the ties between religion, meaning, and purpose. After all, the data seem to show that socially-oriented religion practiced within a community leads to a stronger sense of life-meaning and purpose, while private and inner-oriented religious practice does not. In that case, is it religion alone, or are there other factors included in religious affiliation that lead to a deep sense of life-meaning?

There are additional studies which conclusively demonstrate that social affiliation is key to a deep sense of purpose, regardless of religious belief. Take, as an example, four studies which show a significant correlation between a person's sense of belonging and their perception of life-meaning and purpose. When researchers in two of the studies asked participants about a sense of belonging and purpose, they found clear correlations. When the tricky researchers in the other two other studies used priming techniques to cause participants

to artificially experience a sense of belonging, they found that their methods resulted in a much higher perception of life-meaning.<sup>7,8</sup>

Such findings should not be surprising. Quite a bit of recent neuroscience research underscores the vital role that social bonds play in how our brains function. Our brains are inherently sociable as a result of our evolution. A sense of meaning and purpose is neurologically wired to social connectedness because our ancestors who had this sense outcompeted the ones who did not.

In the United States and many countries in the world—especially in South America and in Africa—religious communities are currently the main venue for reflecting on questions of meaning and purpose in life, as well as the main source of community bonds. This supports the studies indicating that religious belief is correlated with a strong sense of purpose. But contradictory support is provided by research on societies which are less religious and more secular. For example, my research on the Soviet Union illustrates how Soviet civic groups and cultural centers, all non-religious, offered citizens many opportunities to find meaning and purpose in life, as well as fun and pleasure.<sup>9,10</sup> Present-day societies with a more secular orientation than that of the United States have similar stories to tell, as illustrated by research on contemporary Denmark and Sweden.<sup>11</sup>

These findings offer much hope for secular people who want to develop and enrich their sense of life purpose. One way to do so is through social connections, especially ones that allow us to engage with other secular folks. One example is a series of discussion events I co-founded and led with my wife, Agnes Vishnevkin, as part of the Humanist Community of Central Ohio, a local affiliate of American Atheists. Our "Values and Meanings" series provided a reason-oriented venue for secular people to communally reflect on life's meaning and purpose, as well as personal values and ethics from an evidence-based



## Find Your Purpose

### Using Science

Dr. Gleb Tsipursky

**T**his article is adapted from my online course, "*Find Your Purpose Using Science*." In it, I combine academic research with stories from people's everyday lives. I've also designed exercises to help you figure out your own sense of meaning and purpose. "*Find Your Purpose Using Science*" is informed by my own scholarship on meaning and purpose, my experience as a professor, and my role as president of Intentional Insights, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering people to refine and reach their goals by providing research-based content to help improve thinking, feeling, and behavior patterns. To learn more about research-based strategies for finding meaning and purpose in life, including a free online class and workshop video as well as the book, go to [IntentionalInsights.org](http://IntentionalInsights.org). I welcome you to get in touch with me at [Gleb@IntentionalInsights.org](mailto:Gleb@IntentionalInsights.org) to share your own perspective on this topic. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Delicious.com, and check out our channel on YouTube.

***to gain a deep sense of purpose.***

perspective.

At one of the meetings, we were sitting around a table in our home with about eight guests discussing the nature of truth and morality. Some said that truth is generally black and white—either something is true or not. Others insisted that truth has many gray areas. Folks also disagreed on whether it is always moral to tell the truth or whether there are sometimes higher morals than telling the truth.

One scenario was brought up by a participant in her thirties—let’s call her “Anna”—who became an Atheist about six months ago. She comes from a deeply religious household and is openly Atheist with her nuclear family but not to her extended family. She had a big annual family reunion coming up in two weeks, and Anna didn’t know what to do. Should she just conform and pray aloud over dinner along with everyone else? Should she bow her head silently without praying along with the others? Should she keep her head up and refuse to do anything to appear to conform? Should she walk out of the room when the others were praying?

She also didn’t know what to do about the family tradition of everyone dressing up and going to church on Sunday as part of the reunion. She wasn’t sure how to handle conversations with extended family members about her faith perspective. Anna was lost and confused. While she didn’t want to cause a scene, she did want to be authentic with the people in her life. She asked everyone for advice and feedback on her dilemma, and other participants provided her with empathy, as well as diverse perspectives from their own backgrounds and life journeys.

One participant in his fifties stated that for him, family bonds are more important than sharing one’s real feelings, and although he has been an Atheist for two decades, he has not revealed this to his extended family because that would cause a major rift. Another woman talked about her own experience of coming out gradually to various family members and friends over time in private, personal conversations. She found that doing so helped her preserve the relationships and helped the people in her life feel respected and acknowledged. They both advised Anna against making any sort of

public statement at the reunion, either through words or actions.

Several others disagreed. One participant described how she came out publicly to family members at just such an event to get it over with quickly. She said there was a burst of drama and emotional pain, but then it ended—like ripping off a Band-Aid. Another participant suggested that Anna get the job done by e-mailing the family members beforehand in order to prevent any drama at the reunion. That way, anyone who wanted to talk to her could do so privately. Two other participants simply refused to acknowledge any value higher than being true and authentic to oneself and one’s perspective. They stated that Anna should do only what would reflect the truth.

In the end, Anna decided to write an e-mail to her extended family members. I talked with her at a subsequent gathering, and she described how e-mailing family members in advance worked out really well. Those who cared enough about the issue to have a private conversation pulled her aside to do so. Others simply accepted it. She sat in silence without bowing her head at the dinner and did not go to church with the others. No drama, minimal pain, and she still got the truth out there.

Participants gained a great deal from attending this event. On the anonymous feedback sheets passed around after the event, one participant wrote, “I gained greater insight into how other people navigate difficult discussions regarding truth and values when not all parties agree.” Another wrote that they will now “always question ‘my truth’” and will engage in “thinking more about what I hold true.” A third wrote that “building a sense of community is what I gained.”

Does it matter what kind of meaning and purpose you come to? The research on this question suggests that when it comes to gaining greater mental and physical health, it doesn’t. The process is what’s important, not the outcome. The research also indicates that those of us who ask this question in a setting that does not expect conformity to a specific dogma are the ones who are more likely to gain a deeper perception of meaning and purpose. In other words, the most impactful sense of meaning and purpose

stems from an intentional analysis of one’s self-understanding and path in life along with a subsequent experience of personal agency and empowerment. Such findings indicate that religious communities which generally expect adherents to stick to an externally-imposed dogma do not allow for the deepest sense of life-meaning and purpose.

So believing in god and going to church is not the only way to attain a strong sense of life-meaning and purpose.

***There are studies  
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religious belief.***

You can gain it through personal self-reflection, perhaps by journaling about your own sense of purpose. You can also join a local secular group for community ties and the chance to reflect on life’s purpose and meaning from a reason-based perspective. American Atheists has over 150 affiliates and local partners (see page 40 for the complete list). You can use science-based strategies to find meaning and purpose in life—with no god required!

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# The Cell Biologist

**Jerome finds cells enthralling.  
He loves to make them grow.  
The more he learns about a cell,  
The more he wants to know.**

**Jerome craves every honor  
His cell research can net.  
The more awards that he receives,  
The more he wants to get.**

**The Bible may deny it,  
And yet I know it's true:  
A man can serve two masters, and  
That's just what many do.**

~ Felicia Nimue Ackerman

This poem first appeared in *The Providence Journal*



# *Thomas Jefferson's Struggle with Islamic Brutality*

by Eric Wojciechowski

"Islam was founded on the Laws of the Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have answered their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as prisoners, and that every Mussulman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise." ~Thomas Jefferson

**O**n September 11, 2001, the United States was given a taste of what Europe and the Middle East have been suffering, in one form or another, for the past thousand years: the unbending wrath of religious extremists. Religious conflict is what drove settlers to the New World in the first place, and up until 9/11, America managed to leave the overseas religious disputes and violence behind. The U.S. does have its own soiled background of anti-Catholicism during the influx of Irish immigrants in the 1800s, as well as a history of less-than-welcoming attitudes toward Jewish newcomers. More recently, the assassinations and clinic-bombings committed by anti-abortion activists have been carried out in the name of religious extremism. But otherwise, America's pre-9/11 mindset has been that religious violence generally happened "over there." So when planes piloted by hijackers with a seventh-century ideology came crashing into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, the world got a little smaller and America entered into the conflict that today shows no signs of stopping.

***The First Barbary War, Jefferson's handling of the situation, and his***



# ***Like creationism today, when facts start interfering with scripture, sometimes the facts have to go.***

This contemporary conflict is actually the second time that the United States has been troubled by terrorism justified by the tenets of Islam. For decades before its founding, as well as for some years after, the United States was plagued with the same enemy it faces today, and the first leader to take the necessary steps to try and end it once and for all was Thomas Jefferson.

Before the British Colonies became the United States, colonial merchant vessels were protected from pirates by British and French ships. But after winning its independence, the U.S. was on its own. America's first loss to Islamic terrorism came in 1784, when Muslim pirates from North Africa seized the *Betsey* in Mediterranean waters. It was a practice that had been going on against European vessels since the sixteenth century. As coincidence would have it, 1784 was also the year that Thomas Jefferson took up his position as Minister of France, settled into his new European home, and began to negotiate a deal to stop these seizures.

The European solution to North African piracy was to pay a tribute to the sovereign of the Barbary (present-day Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia). In return, they'd leave Europe's shipping trade alone. But it was up to each country to settle its own treaties and payments, and if a country fell behind on a payment, it risked losing its ships to seizure. With no financial power to pay the tributes demanded by the Barbary, the United States found itself helpless. The only alternative was to wage war, but the young country didn't have a navy yet.

In 1785, Jefferson met up with John Adams (the first U.S. ambassador to Britain) in England and was introduced to Abd al-Rahman, the ambassador of Tripoli. It was the first of only two times that Jefferson was knowingly in the company of a Muslim. Jefferson and Adams took the occasion to ask on what grounds Tripoli was seizing American merchant ships. In a letter to Secretary of Foreign Affairs John Jay, Jefferson and Adams explained, "the Ambassador answered us, that it was founded on the law of their great Prophet: that it was written in the Koran, that all Nations who should not have acknowledged their Authority were sinners: that it was their right & duty to make war upon them whenever they could be found, & to make slaves of all they could take as prisoners; & that every Mussulman [Muslim] who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise."

Jefferson attempted to create a coalition of tribute-paying European countries who would each contribute one or more war ships and jointly patrol the Mediterranean for Barbary pirates. Sometime before July 4, 1786, Jefferson drafted the Proposed Convention against the Barbary States to arrange the matter. It would be the first formal attempt at what is today advocated by Atheist activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali. In a 2010

*Wall Street Journal* commentary, Hirsi Ali called for the media "to do stories of Muhammad where his image is shown as much as possible. These stories do not have to be negative or insulting, they just need to spread the risk. The aim is to confront hypersensitive Muslims with more targets than they can possibly contend with" ("*South Park* and the Informal Fatwa," April 27, 2010, WSJ.com). Jefferson's proposal to spread the risk was met with a lack of interest from both the American Congress and European nations. As a result, America continued to lose ships to Barbary piracy for several more years.

It wasn't until Jefferson became president that the U.S. ceased paying tribute and quietly launched the newly formed American navy to combat, particularly, the aggression from Tripoli. Thus began the First Barbary War in 1801, which ended in 1805 with a treaty that put a stop to the tributes and cleared the Mediterranean for the safe passage of American merchant ships. (In 1807, Algiers started taking American ships again, and it took until 1815 for America to address it militarily. This second Barbary War lasted two days and finally put an end to piracy from North Africa.)

Yet despite being told by the Ambassador of Tripoli in 1785 that all of it was justified by the tenets of Islam, Jefferson didn't take him at his word. Jefferson felt the real reason was just good old-fashioned economics and geopolitics. In Jefferson's autobiography, he simply referred to them as "lawless pirates," not Muslims obeying their holy book. Whether Jefferson was right or wrong, the ambassador said their piracy was justified by divine will, and there's no reason not to take the ambassador at his word.

Jefferson was the only founding father to take an active interest in Islam. He purchased his own copy of the Koran long before America's encounters with the Barbary. His copy of George Sale's English translation of the Koran was shipped from London in 1765 and can be viewed today at the Library of Congress. There is some speculation that this is a second copy because Jefferson possibly lost his first copy in the May 26, 1771, fire at his mother's home. The Koran in the Library of Congress contains no written notes or comments by Jefferson (possibly because it's a second copy), and his initials are his only inscription, although they appear curiously close to some verses regarding warfare.

Jefferson wrote no essays or letters on Islam, and he did not do to the Koran what he did to the New Testament, which was to literally cut out all the miracles and hocus-pocus parts. His re-write of the New Testament, commonly called the Jefferson Bible, was completed around 1819 and is currently held at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. Considering his in-depth interest in religion, his near

## ***attitude about Islam in general is an excellent lesson for today.***

# ***Jefferson understood what many of us know today: Islam is the problem, not Muslims.***

silence on Islam is interesting. This does not mean he had no opinion of Islam. According to Denise A. Spellberg, author of *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an: Islam and the Founding Fathers*, Jefferson "did subscribe to the anti-Islamic views of most of his contemporaries, and in politics he made effective use of the rhetoric they inspired."

By 1776, most Americans considered Islam to be a made-up religion by Muhammad, a false prophet. One of the passages that Jefferson copied into his Legal Commonplace Book is Voltaire's insistence that "the Saracens [Muslims] wanted no science except the Alcoran [Koran]." In a 1785 letter to John Page, Jefferson wrote that the Ottomans were "...a set of Barbarians with whom an opposition to all science is an article of religion." Jefferson also believed Islam to be a stifler of free inquiry. Spellberg seems mystified by this stance, given the fact that Jefferson was well aware of the many contributions Islamic adherents had made to science. My speculation is that Jefferson wasn't contemplating what Islam used to be, but what Islam was *in his time*. Scientific inquiry had been on the decline in Islamic nations for over two hundred years when Jefferson began his work separating church from government in the United States. Like creationism today, when facts start interfering with scripture, sometimes the facts have to go. So perhaps that's why Jefferson and Voltaire were characterizing Islam as anti-science and anti-free inquiry.

Despite Jefferson being told by the ambassador of Tripoli that the Koran justified their piracy, and despite his own opinion of Islam, Jefferson did not consider every Muslim to be a threat. I suspect this was based on his belief that a person's morality is not based on their religion. In an August 6, 1818, letter to Mrs. M. Harrison Smith, he wrote, "I never told my own religion, nor scrutinized that of another. I never attempted to make a convert, nor wished to change another's creed. I have ever judged of the religion of others by their lives...For it is in our lives, and not from our words, that our religion must be read. By the same test the world must judge me."

And in the first volume of his *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies*, Jefferson wrote about the debates in the Virginia General Assembly when drafting the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom, which was passed in 1789. He had this to say about an amendment that was proposed for the preamble to mention Jesus Christ as the author of their religion: "[It] was rejected by a great majority, in proof that they meant to comprehend within the mantle of its protection the Jews and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo, and infidel of every denomination."

Jefferson understood what many of us know today: Islam is the problem, not Muslims. The two can be separated. In a 1788 letter to James Madison, he wrote, "The declaration that religious faith shall be unpunished does not give immunity to criminal acts dictated by religious error." Looking at the First Barbary War, it now becomes clear. The piracy of the Barbary States, regardless of reasoning, needed to be met with

a repelling force. The opinions of Muhammad as written in the Koran were beside the point.

The First Barbary War, Jefferson's handling of the situation, and his attitude about Islam in general is an excellent lesson for today. Whereas the events of September 11, 2001, were launched by a small group of nineteen hijackers and their handlers with a budget of only \$400,000, this new menace holds large swaths of land, resources, and money. It's beginning to look like a Barbary redux, but on a scale that has the potential to be massively more destructive than anything those states ever accomplished. Last summer, the civil war in Syria spawned the monster that would become the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS). Formerly allied with al-Qaeda, this faction has grown far beyond small groups hiding in caves. As of this writing, they control huge areas of Syria and Iraq while claiming provinces in Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and Algeria with more to surely follow if they continue their aggressions. Boko Haram of Nigeria has pledged its allegiance to ISIS. So have other groups from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Indonesia, and the Philippines. But unlike the Barbary, which was content to expand its territory no further than North Africa, ISIS recognizes no borders and proclaims it a duty to Allah to continue these assaults and seizures until the entire world is under its control.

We face the same danger today as then by assuming the worst of all Muslims. Even before the Barbary Wars, Americans (and Europeans) did not have a favorable opinion of them or Islam. After the First Barbary War, the first American edition of the Koran was published. Perhaps because of the war, an audience was made to want to know more. The introduction to that edition begins, "This book is a long conference of God, the angels, and Mohomet, which that false prophet very grossly invented" and ends with, "Thou wilt wonder that such absurdities have infected the best part of the world, and wilt avouch, that the knowledge of what is contained in this book, will render that law contemptible." Clearly, the opinion of Islam remained quite negative in a Protestant-dominated population.

With history as our best teacher, how should we steer into the future? Do we start appeasing the Islamic State with payments of ransom when they take hostages? The Obama Administration validated this option in June. No matter what, we must be tolerant of Muslims at home who participate in American secular society. We should open up, encourage conversations, and join with those who are a part of our free and democratic society. The first step begins with any neighbors you already have. What would Jefferson do? We already know.

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Eric Wojciechowski writes from his home state of Michigan, where he lives with his wife and two children. He has engaged in the study of religion, mythology, and other woo-woo topics for over twenty-five years.





*"I dunno, it's kinda exciting watching  
them all fight over me."*

# What If We Taught Students That Religion is Absurd?

by Marshall Brain



Photo: Wiki Commons

**T**he religiosity of America fascinates me. I am intrigued by the idea of millions of people in an advanced nation believing that they have a “relationship” with an imaginary friend and believing that this imaginary friend is answering their prayers. In the United States, something like 76% of the population believes in god, and seventy percent of the population identifies as Christian.<sup>1</sup> Three quarters of the U.S. population believes that the Bible was at least inspired by god, and 28% (more than 89 million people) believe the stories in it are literally true.<sup>2</sup> Why would anyone today believe that the Christian god is real or that the story of Noah’s ark is true?

My goal here is to advocate that we, as a society, start an active campaign to make religion irrelevant to human civilization. In the same way that there have been active campaigns to eliminate diseases like smallpox and polio, we should start a similar campaign against religion. The tool I propose for religion’s elimination is across-the-board-

education in critical thinking.

But first, let’s step back for a moment and ask, How do we find ourselves in this position as a species? There are many interesting things that human beings do. Music, math, tools, cooking, science, engineering, art, and language all come to mind. But religion ranks up there as perhaps the most interesting. Religion stands out because it is so irrational and bizarre. Billions of people on this planet believe in their various imaginary beings so firmly that disagreements about religion often escalate to violence and warfare.

We, therefore, must ask two questions: What would cause such firm, bizarre beliefs, and what can be done about them? The fact that believers are often indoctrinated from birth and immersed in a highly religious culture certainly comes into play. The fact that some religious beliefs are quite comforting is also a factor. For example, believing that you live on after death and get to reunite with dead friends and relatives is certainly appealing. If you ignore the fact that these beliefs are

***Atheists win the lottery at the same statistical rate as praying Christians.***



# ***Why would a person believe that god is answering prayers, given the observations that anyone can make in the real world?***

nonsensical from a scientific standpoint, it is easy to accept them. If you never bother to learn any science or critical thinking, it is easier still.

Let me propose another idea: The widespread belief in prayer is important fuel for the religious fire that burns inside many people. Tantalizing verses in the Bible encourage Christians to pray. Mark 11:24 says, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Matthew 18:19 says, “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” John 14:14 says, “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

If a critical thinker ponders prayer, it is quickly obvious that prayer is purely a superstition. Any unbiased person who looks at the evidence critically can see that every “answered prayer” is a coincidence. After all, if we pray to god to heal an amputee, nothing ever happens, despite a number of verses in the Bible to the contrary. And if our prayer concerns an ordinary event, the outcome always follows the statistical patterns we would expect. It is not as if thousands of faithful Christians all pray and win the lottery simultaneously. Atheists win the lottery at the same statistical rate as praying Christians. But billions of Christians believe otherwise.

How can that be? Why would a person believe that god is answering prayers, given the observations that anyone can make in the real world? How can the belief in the power of prayer be so ubiquitous? This is where things get interesting.

A variety of biases and fallacies underpin the belief in prayer. The belief in prayer shows us that unless a person is trained in critical thinking, these mental derailments dominate the thinking process. Then why do so many highly educated people believe in the power of prayer? Even if someone makes a living by thinking rationally and critically (doctors, scientists, engineers, lawyers, actuaries, and statisticians all come to mind), compartmentalization can prevent them from taking an analytical approach to prayer. Critical thinking is never allowed into the religion compartment.

Another big problem is confirmation bias, which is the selective acceptance of new information that ignores all contradictory evidence. This explains how someone can make special note of the prayers that work while ignoring all of the

prayers that fail. This occurs, for example, when a praying Christian beats cancer or survives a car accident. They will shout about their answered prayers to anyone who will listen. Survivors sometimes get tremendous media attention, as in the case of Petra Anderson, a victim of the 2012 mass shooting in a Colorado theater during a showing of the latest Batman movie, *The Dark Night Rises*.

Petra survived her life-threatening injuries because a pellet from the shotgun missed hitting any of the blood vessels or major structures of her brain.<sup>3</sup> In a blog post about the incident, the pastor of Petra’s church said that when god was creating Petra, he arranged the blood vessels in her head so that they would miss the bullet that he knew would be fired at her in the twenty-third year of her life: “In Christianity, we call it *prevenient grace*: God working ahead of time for a particular event in the future. It’s just like the God I follow to plan the route of a bullet through a brain long before Batman ever rises. Twenty-two years before.”<sup>4</sup> Twelve other people were not so lucky, but we’ll never hear from them about their failed prayers because they are dead. There was no *prevenient grace* for them because the idea of *prevenient grace* is nonsense.

The *post hoc* fallacy is another way that people can be fooled into thinking that prayer works. A *post hoc* fallacy misattributes causation. In the mind of an untrained thinker, the fact that event A follows event B means that event A was caused by event B. So a Christian thinks, “I prayed to God for X, and it happened. Therefore, God answered my prayer!” This fallacy combined with confirmation bias is a powerful force. Add to that the placebo effect or the regression fallacy in the medical realm, and belief in prayer can go off the charts. And there’s also groupthink, where a group of people compel their members to toe the line on shared beliefs—or else.

How can a middle-class Christian believe that god answers her trivial prayers while also allowing billions of people on the planet to live in devastating poverty? Doublethink makes this possible. It allows uncritical thinkers to believe two opposing ideas simultaneously. The problem is that these poor thinking patterns are not limited to the religious sphere. They inevitably leak out to other activities. For example, people who lack critical thinking skills also vote, and their inability to think clearly leaves them vulnerable to confirmation bias, the *post hoc* fallacy, groupthink, doublethink, and many other derailments that are encouraged by political campaigns.

## ***If we pray to god to heal an amputee, nothing ever happens, despite a number of verses in the Bible to the contrary.***

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36

# ***The Boy Scout Ban on Atheists and the Camp Quest Solution***



The Boy Scout Memorial in Washington, D.C.

**T**his summer, Camp Quest, Inc., celebrated its twentieth year serving youth from non-religious families. As the first overnight camp for the children of Atheists, agnostics, and freethinkers, Camp Quest started in 1996 with twenty campers for one week in Boone County, Kentucky, just outside Cincinnati. The summer of 2015 saw 1,300 kids attending Camp Quest sessions in fourteen different states as well as the U.K., Switzerland, and Norway.

Camp Quest's Board of Directors is now led by two former Boy Scout leaders, Shawn Jeffers (Chair) and Neil Polzin (Vice Chair). As teenagers, Shawn and Neil both earned the rank of Eagle Scout, and both are now unwelcome in the Boy Scouts of America—Neil for being an Atheist and Shawn for being an Atheist and gay.

Neil lost his job as a waterfront director at a Boy Scout camp in 2009 when the organization learned about his activism in the secular community, including his work as an undergraduate with the Secular Student Alliance chapter at California State Polytechnic Institute, Pomona. He's been involved with Camp Quest West since 2008. Shawn left the Boy Scouts in 2002 after coming out as gay and as an Atheist. He's been involved with Camp Quest since 2003. He's currently a counselor and the operations director for Camp Quest Ohio.

The Boy Scouts lifted the ban on gay youth membership in 2013. In July of this year, they lifted the ban on openly gay adult leaders. Sort of. But not really. Each Boy Scout unit (troop) is owned and operated through a charter organization, which is classified as civic, faith-based, or educational. The organizations that are faith-based comprise about seventy percent of all units, and they can continue to impose the ban on openly gay leaders if they like. The Boy Scouts have made no changes to the ban on membership for Atheists.

In this article, Shawn and Neil talk about their personal journeys and why the Boy Scouts' discrimination policies are nothing but destructive.



# I Chose Truth Over the Boy Scouts

by Shawn Jeffers

When I joined Cub Scout Pack 875 in Mason, Ohio, at age six, I began an eighteen-year experience with the Boy Scouts of America. During my years as a Scout, I was able to attend conferences, jamborees, and camping trips in fifteen different states. Every summer, from age thirteen through eighteen, I spent at least two weeks at either overnight camp or another program. Through scouting, I learned about tying knots, ecology, first aid, and so much more. I am an over-packer to this day, thanks to the Boy Scout motto, “Be Prepared.”

Scouting gave me a solid foundation in leadership. I learned about commitment and responsibility, and I acquired the skills necessary to encourage members of a group to cooperate. I use these skills daily in my professional career as an activist.

I grew up in a semi-religious family. Although I was never baptized, I would regularly attend Catholic mass with my mom. My dad came from a Baptist family, but he never went to church other than for a wedding or funeral. My experience with the Baptist faith was limited to the times I attended services when I visited my aunt. So while I was exposed to religion growing up, it was never anything that resonated with me.

During my junior year of high school, I began to privately identify as agnostic as a way to get around the Boy Scouts’ policy of excluding gays and Atheists. The only time anyone in the organization really pressed me on my faith was in 1996 during my review to become an Eagle Scout. One of the leaders, who happened to attend the same Catholic church as my family, asked me how my belief in God was helping me on my path to becoming an Eagle Scout. I told him what he wanted to hear: religion and my relationship with God were important parts of my life. It was the only review question I didn’t answer honestly, but I didn’t want the truth to prevent me from becoming an Eagle Scout.

This is the very reason why the Boy Scouts’ ban on gays and Atheists is purely destructive. The first point of the Scout Law says that a Scout is trustworthy, but I couldn’t be true to myself and also be true to their policies. On that day, after choosing the Boy Scouts over the truth, I made a personal pledge to never again be untrue to myself. The moment of that decision is the most formative one from my sixteen years in Boy Scouts.

After that, I was much more open about my lack of religious faith. I wasn’t yet openly Atheist or agnostic (I was still trying



Shawn Jeffers leading team games at Camp Quest Ohio 2010

Photo courtesy of Camp Quest

to figure out which word best fit me), so if a scout leader asked, I’d tell them that I wasn’t religious and leave it at that. If they pressed, I would point out that the Scout Law states that a scout is reverent, and “reverent” is another word for respectful. Therefore, I was respectful towards other religious beliefs. This answer usually satisfied them.

One day in 2002, while I was working at a summer camp, I got into a conversation with a younger troop leader who agreed that the Boy Scouts’ discriminatory policies should be overturned. While we were talking, he gave me a patch to sew on my uniform. It was the unofficial Inclusive Scouting patch, which identifies the wearer as an ally of those who are affected by the Scouts’ exclusionary policies. The image on the patch is of two ropes tied together in a square knot. One rope is purple and silver, and the other is multi-colored. The purple and silver rope refers to the purple- and silver-colored knot badges that scouts can earn through religious programs, and the multicolored rope signifies support for the inclusion of gays. Once the Inclusive Scouting patch was sewn onto my uniform,

***It’s ironic that the skills I acquired in scouting were what gave me the strength to leave.***

# ***Refusing to be silent about who I really am is the very thing that makes me unworthy of being a Boy Scout.***

leaders would regularly ask me about it because none of them had ever seen one before.

The conversation typically went like this. Leader: “What is that patch?” Me: “It’s from Inclusive Scouting and represents my support for the inclusion of gays and Atheists in Boy Scouts.” Leader (with a scrunched face): “Oh...” And then they would share their rationale for why one group should be excluded while conceding that it would probably be okay to include the other group.

If they were in favor of the ban on gays, they usually alluded to some unfounded fear about the risk of pedophilia—but they were in favor of including Atheists as long as they accepted the organization’s historical connection with religion. Support for maintaining the ban on Atheists usually involved pointing out that “duty to God” is part of the Scout Oath—but they were in favor of the possibility of allowing gays.

I loved those interactions because it was always a leader who initiated them, and once they were engaged in the conversation, they were forced to really stop and think about these policies. And although I initially wore the patch to be an ally of gays and Atheists seeking inclusion, it turned out that the process of having these conversations was the very thing that enabled me to come into my own identity.

During the third week of camp that same summer, I engaged in a conversation with a scout leader that I had known for many years. She asked me about the patch, and we had the typical exchange. But since I knew her very well, I pushed back strongly on her assertion that inclusion of gays would lead to child-molestation. During our heated discussion, she asked me, “Why do you care about this so much? Are you gay?”

I had been asked that question many times previously, and when I’d say that I wasn’t gay, I believed I was answering the question honestly. But her conversation, along with the other ones that summer, led me to examine my own identity more thoroughly. And when I told her that yes, I was gay, it was the first time I had ever answered that question out loud, in the affirmative. Part of me answered “yes” simply to win the argument—or at least stun her into silence. But later that day, I realized—for the first time in my life—that what I had said was true.

And once again, I was caught between policies and personal values. This time, I chose the truth. I came out as both gay and Atheist and resigned my position before the camp session was over. I was offered the opportunity to stay employed and leave

the Boy Scouts at the end of the summer, but I had already wasted enough time hiding who I really was. It was time to start my authentic life.

It’s ironic that the skills I acquired in scouting were what gave me the strength to leave. And it did require strength. Refusing to be silent about who I really am is the very thing that makes me unworthy of being a Boy Scout. How unnecessarily destructive.

The silver lining is that I started volunteering for Camp Quest the following summer, where I knew I didn’t have to hide my lack of belief. But I was still carrying a lot of baggage from Scouts and did have a certain amount of trepidation about the stigma of homosexuality and its misguided association to pedophilia. But the Camp Quest community accepted me with open arms, and my sexual orientation was never something I had to be embarrassed about or hide. It was great to be welcomed so warmly.

Even if the Boy Scouts were to completely lift the bans on gays and Atheists, I wouldn’t go back. Changing a policy doesn’t change a culture, and the Boy Scouts have a long way to go to create the type of community that fosters real inclusion, especially since church-affiliated groups are still allowed to uphold the ban.

I truly appreciate scouting for everything it gave me. The Boy Scout slogan is “Do A Good Turn Daily,” and I continue to use my scouting skills to make a difference at Camp Quest. I

hope that by doing so I am able to encourage these campers to embrace their true selves wherever they go.

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Eagle Scout Shawn Jeffers in 1996



The unofficial patch for Inclusive Scouting



# I Was Expelled for Being an Atheist

by Neil Polzin

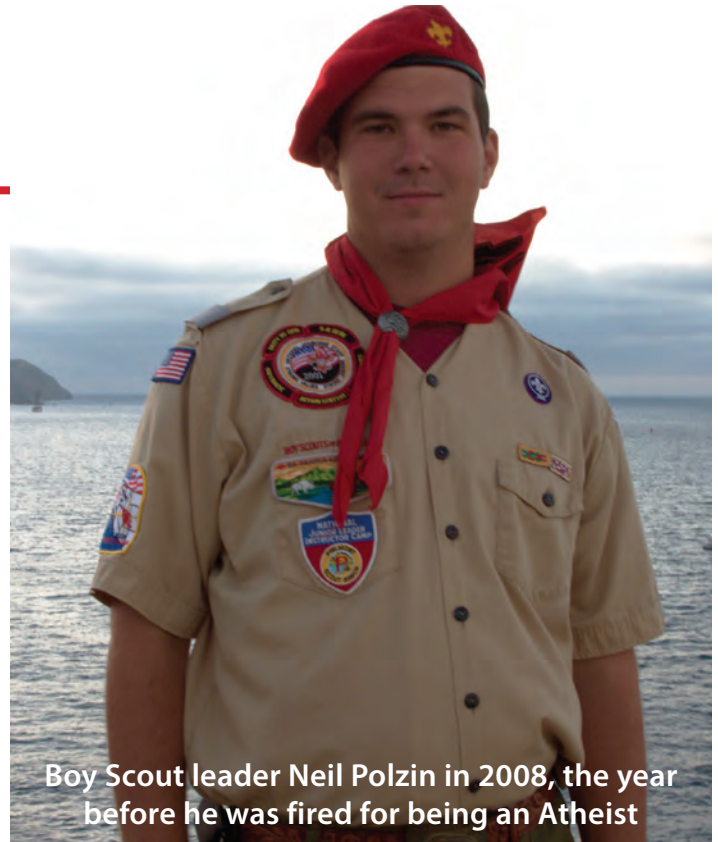
**I**n 1994, at the beginning of fifth grade, I joined Cub Scout Pack 820, which met in the auditorium of my public elementary school in Covina, California. The following year, I transitioned to Boy Scout Troop 448, which was chartered out of the local Catholic parish. Some of the scouts belonged to that parish, but the majority were loosely affiliated with other churches, if at all. Although my own family considered itself generically Christian, we didn't belong to a church. My mother was raised Catholic, and my father grew up in a Lutheran household, but our family wasn't religious at all.

By age thirteen, I had set my sights on becoming an Eagle Scout and couldn't wait to turn fourteen so that I could earn my Life Guard Certification, which would be a gateway to even more scouting activities. By that time, I was camping one weekend every month and attending week-long camps every summer. The scouting program also fueled my interest in science with the chemistry and atomic energy merit badges offered through California State Polytechnic Institute, Pomona, which I would later attend as a chemistry major.

The Boy Scouts also offer many opportunities to explore religion, and they welcome all types of religious belief, except for non-belief. I was given a lot of exposure to a variety of religious people and practices, but I came up empty-handed every time I had questions or looked for logic. Although I couldn't bring myself to say it out loud, I gave up the idea of god when I was sixteen without even knowing the word "Atheist."

But I didn't dwell on it. I was busy training to be a lifeguard in the off season and was working for the San Gabriel Valley Council at Camp Cherry Valley and Camp Trask. During the summer, I was able to attend National Junior Leadership Instructor Training at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, one of only three camps in the country run by the national office. I also staffed a National Scout Jamboree for the Western Region at Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia. Every weekend of the school year, as well as my entire summer, was spent on a camp staff. Besides giving me a community of close friends, the Scouts provided incredible travel opportunities and independence.

The Boy Scouts' policy of discrimination of gays and Atheists was nothing new to me, though I had never heard of



Boy Scout leader Neil Polzin in 2008, the year before he was fired for being an Atheist

anyone actually being kicked out. It seemed more like a relic of the past than current policy, like laws against cursing in front of a woman or spitting in public that are still on the books in some places. But when *Rolling Stone* published a feature article about the discrimination in 2000, it was suddenly a conversation. Scout leaders who openly opposed the ban against gays sewed a patch on their uniforms that showed support for Inclusive Scouting. I don't recall ever hearing of anyone wearing anything that called for the inclusion of Atheists.

It was while I was looking deeper into this controversy that I first learned the word "Atheist," and once I did, I embraced it. This was during my freshman year of college. When I found out that Cal Poly Pomona had a chapter of something called the Secular Student Alliance (SSA), I enthusiastically signed up and became quite active right away. Before long, I joined their national Board of Directors and later worked for them as a regional organizer.

Fast forward several years to being an adult still very involved with the Boy Scouts. I remained an employee of the local council for the better part of a decade. In my home troop, I was the assistant scoutmaster and worked my way up to aquatics director for the Cub Scout program at Camp Cherry Valley.

Among my relatively young and progressive staff, it was no secret that I didn't believe in a god. The topic came up from

***The Boy Scouts welcome all types of religious belief, except for non-belief.***

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# The *Cruci-fiction* of Jesus

by Michael B. Paulkovich

W as Jesus tortured and executed? This question demands exploration of several related quandaries, as internal contradictions pervade the Bible, and the holy scriptures conflict fiercely with known history. Even the Gospels themselves disagree on all the important aspects of the Christ story. There are geographical errors and contradictions with the law in Judea—there's no way the Romans would have crucified someone accused of blasphemy against the Hebrew god; even if they did, they never would have let "Joseph of Arimathea" recover the body. Moreover, if the Jews were involved in executing Jesus, they would not have used crucifixion. Everything about Jesus' supposed crucifixion stinks to high and exalted heaven.

***Comparing the Gospels to one another side-by-side produces***



# ***Matthew says an angel was in the tomb. Mark says there was a young man. Two men are in the tomb according to Luke. Who's there in John's Gospel? No one!***

## **When?**

We know the stories claim Jesus was crucified during the Passover weekend, but what do the Gospels say in detail? The Gospel of John (13:1 and 18:28) has Jesus dying before Passover, while Matthew 26 claims that he died the day *after* he shared the Passover meal with his followers. Mark 15:25 asserts that the crucifixion was in the third hour, while John 19:14 says the sixth hour. Luke 24 and Mark 16 claim Jesus was transported to heaven immediately after his resurrection. But John 20:26, Acts 1:3, and Acts 13 have Jesus beaming up anywhere from eight to forty days afterward.

The best of historical scholarship places Jesus' supposed crucifixion somewhere between the years 25-36 C.E. His supposed age at his death, thirty or so, poses inescapable problems for Christian belief because of what John 8:57 says: "The Jews therefore said to him: Thou art not yet fifty years old." From such a statement, one logically infers Jesus was in his forties, and early churches claimed *just that*—he was forty-nine upon his death, in stark contradiction to the Gospels. In that case, he died c. 45 or 55 C.E. In his book *Orpheus, a History of Religions*, Salomon Reinach observed that "the founder of the library in Jerusalem, about 210 [C.E.], even contended that Jesus had died in 58 [C.E.] under Nero!"

## **What?**

Let us examine some Gospel passages side-by-side and compare their stories. This is something that Christians obviously do not do or they would see the contradictions. The anonymous author of Matthew claims that while Jesus was nailed to the cross he screamed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (27:46). So the omnipotent son of god was helpless against mere mortals with spears and a crown made of thorns? This is as strange as it is unbelievable. In fact, the writer of Matthew lifted this phrase directly from Psalm 22:1 virtually word for word: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?"

Similarly, in Luke 23:46, Jesus says, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" just before he dies. This is a plagiarism of Psalm 31: "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

Then we must address the claim of zombies in Matthew 27:52-53, unsupported by any historian: "And tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people."

Further regarding Jesus' execution, the original Gospel of

Mark actually ends at 16:8, where some women discover that Jesus is no longer in his tomb: "They went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid."

If the women told nobody what they saw, how could anybody write of what happened? At some point late in the second century, some scribes realized the blunder and added verses 9-20, which were concocted to include the post-death appearance of Jesus, a casting out of seven "devils" from Mary Magdalene, and Jesus' appearance "in another form." Fortunately, today there is no intelligent person who believes in devils.

## **Where?**

Ask a Christian where Jesus was crucified, and they will probably say Nazareth. Not only does that particular narrative hold no water, but you would no doubt also get differing answers from various Christians when asked where Jesus magically reappeared.

In Luke 4:29, Jesus is taken into Nazareth "unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built." Yet Nazareth always and even today has occupied a meager and shallow desert valley, not a hill. The writer of Luke clearly had never been to Nazareth. Matthew 28:16 has Jesus appearing post-crucifixion to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Luke 24, Mark 15-16, and John 20 all set his appearance in Jerusalem, some one hundred miles to the south.

Regarding his supposed birthplace, there was no active settlement in the tiny borough of Nazareth during the early first century.

## **Who?**

Comparing the gospels to one another side-by-side also produces conflicting accounts regarding who went to the tomb of Jesus. John 20 says it was Mary Magdalene. Matthew 28:1 says Mary Magdalene and another girl peeked inside. Mark 16:1 claims it was Mary Magdalene, Salome, and another girl. Luke 23:49 says "the women" went there.

Regardless of who took a gander inside, what they found inside is nothing consistent. Matthew 28:2 says it was an angel. Mark 16:5 says there was a young man. Two men are in the tomb according to Luke 24:4. Who's there in John's gospel? No one!

## **Why?**

Christian mythology holds that god sent his only son to perform suicide by cop—or perhaps suicide by centurion. With that being the case, Judas should be honored by Christians for betraying Jesus and allowing him to be martyred. If Jesus is not

# ***conflicting accounts regarding who went to the tomb of Jesus.***

# ***Christian mythology holds that god sent his only son to perform suicide by cop— or perhaps suicide by centurion.***

crucified, his mission to save us is an utter failure. As Paul admits in 1 Corinthians 15:14, “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” Thus Judas is the good guy, an indispensable character supporting the pivotal plot-point in the Christian story. Jesus’ entire plan from the very beginning was that he be killed and then revered forever. Without Judas, Jesus would have to die after living a full life on Earth, never martyred and never adored as savior and sacred scapegoat. Judas is the hero of Christianity. Paul, by the way, would also have been inculcated with belief in Sandan, the mythical founder of his hometown of Tarsus. Sandan was another son of god who was supposedly resurrected after his death.

In reality, the Romans would never have crucified Jesus or even considered the matter, as they had not the slightest interest in Hebrew theological disputes. Roman authorities may have allowed the Jews to stone Jesus for blasphemy under the Hebrew law outlined in Leviticus 24:14: “Take the blasphemer outside the camp, and tell all those who heard the curse to lay their hands on his head. Then let the entire community stone him to death.” But then, that is not the story presented in the New Testament.

Roman rulers were concerned with the visual effects of the punishment of crucifixion as a deterrent against future crimes. As Roman author M. Fabius Quintilianus wrote in the first century, “When we crucify criminals, the most frequented roads are chosen, where the greatest number of people can look and be seized by this fear. For every punishment has less to do with the offense than with the example.”

Romans were uninterested in granting dead felons any tomb. They left bodies on trees or poles for days and even weeks as an example to would-be criminals. Then, after mangy buzzards had picked the meat away, they would simply dispose of the fallen bones with neither ritual nor respect.

The Gospel of Mark says that Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body. While the tale has Pilate granting Joseph’s appeal, the real Pilate would not have wasted his time even speaking to Joseph. After chastising the guard who let Joseph inside his private quarters, Pilate would have ordered that Jesus be left where he was to rot.

The “logic” behind Christianity speaks for itself. “Kill me,” Jesus says, “and I’ll forgive everyone for something that Adam and Eve did in the booby-trapped Garden of Eden.” Such is Christian belief.

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time to time around the campfire between sessions, but it was never a big deal. I was never required to lead any prayers, and I could stand idly by during prayers before meals, which were non-denominational to the point of often not even mentioning a god.

But as I got older, I started to feel a growing tension between my identities as an Atheist and as a scout. I had long ago decided that, if asked, I wouldn't lie about my Atheism. My close friends in the scouts even knew about my work with SSA. But I found myself actively avoiding several of the camps that had mostly Mormon staff, including a chaplain.

An odd couple of years followed while I was active in the secular movement as well as returning to Boy Scout camp each summer. It was during this time that I first heard about Camp Quest. My first stint as a Camp Quest counselor was in 2009, which was also my tenth season on the waterfront staff for Cherry Valley and my third session as aquatics director. It was also the year my Atheist identity was leveraged against me when a fellow staff member brought it to everyone's attention that my religious status on Facebook was "Atheist."

Deciding not to leave my fate in limbo, I wrote a letter to the local council to confirm my Atheism and question their policy banning non-believers. I quickly received a response revoking my registration with the organization and demanding I sever my involvement in the Scouts. I was a graduate student at the time, and my position as aquatics director at Camp Cherry Valley was my only source of income. But even worse was being told that I would never again be allowed to even be present at any Boy Scout activity anywhere.

I received many calls in the week that followed, mostly from staff expressing their shock at my expulsion. The camp director called me to let me know that he had spoken out on my behalf. Despite knowing that I was ordered to sever my relationships, he invited me to the staff barbecue that took place every year before the start of the summer camp season. I attended, but it was a very odd atmosphere. I was received with open arms and thanks for the years of memories I had made with the staff, yet a sense of helplessness and mourning was apparent.

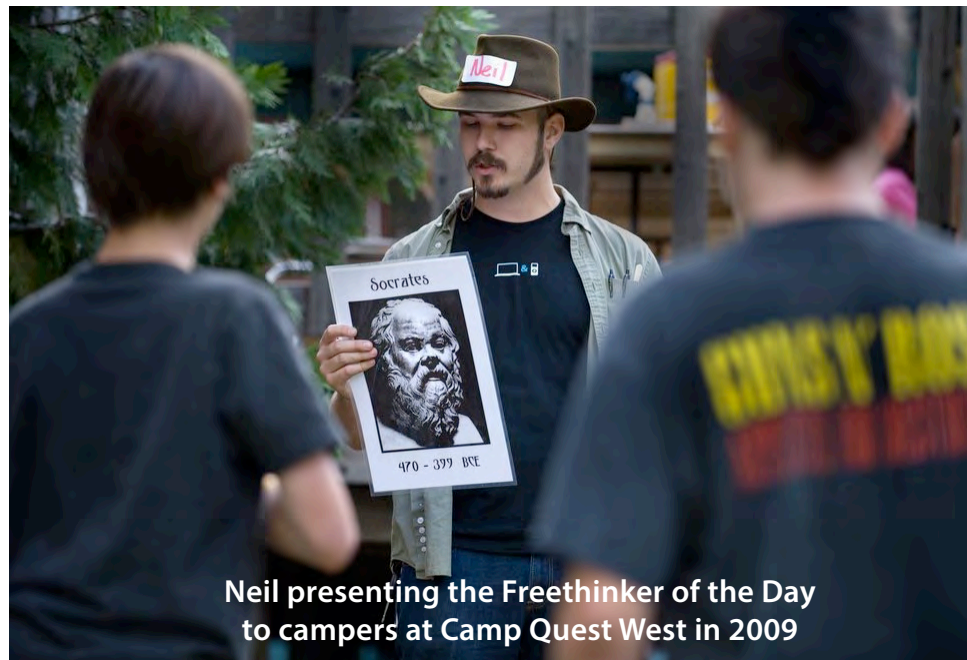
I had been exiled from a community that was the focal point of my life experiences. This should have been a call to action against the Boy Scouts, an organization that receives a lot of free support from the government. My Cub Scout pack was sponsored by a public elementary school and given free meeting space. My Boy Scout troop met at a facility provided by the City of Covina free of rent or utility charges. The Jamboree that I staffed at Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia, was made possible by

subsidized rent of one dollar and was further enabled by site improvements and thousands of hours of labor, all provided by the military for free.

My first session at Camp Quest started just one month after I received the letter discharging me from the Boy Scouts. I wasn't replacing the Boy Scouts with Camp Quest, as I had already been planning to be a counselor there for some time. I was actually signed up for the summer of 2008, but that year's session was canceled due to a wildfire.

As soon as I got there, I knew that this experience would be even better than the Scouts. Here were both boys and girls, leaders who were gay and straight, and people of various religious upbringing, all able to openly be themselves. The summer of 2015 marked my ninth and tenth sessions at Camp Quest and my third year as camp director. This year, I was also elected to serve as the vice chair for the National Board of Directors.

I once made the mistake of thinking the problem of



Neil presenting the Freethinker of the Day to campers at Camp Quest West in 2009

Photo courtesy of Camp Quest

discrimination was over, but it is not. I will not be shamed into the shadows for being an Atheist. I have no reason to be ashamed. Moving forward, the supporters of the Boy Scouts of America, including lawmakers and taxpayers, need to be made aware of the discrimination. We need to make sure that another generation does not learn that being "morally straight" is at odds with being an Atheist or a homosexual.

Neil Polzin's story was adapted from an article previously published in *The Freethought News*.

***I would never again be allowed to even be present at any Boy Scout activity anywhere.***

## 19 Hypocrisies and Counting

“I have been the biggest hypocrite ever.”

~ Josh Duggar, in a statement posted on DugarFamily.com, after his name turned up on a membership list for Ashley Madison, an online resource that facilitates extramarital affairs.



This spring, the Duggar family from TLC’s reality show *19 Kids and Counting* was the focus of unwanted media attention when the eldest son, Josh, was identified in a police report acquired by *In Touch Weekly* as having sexually assaulted five young girls (four of whom are his sisters) in 2002 when he was fourteen years old.

The Duggars are part of the Quiverfull movement, a branch of Christian fundamentalism that forbids birth control, demands total submission of a wife to her husband, and entreats parents to produce as many children as possible. TLC launched the show in 2008, and ever since, Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar have capitalized on the myth that they and their nineteen homeschooled children enjoy consistently wholesome camaraderie, compatibility, and cooperation, all made possible by their particular brand of Christianity.

Josh publicly admitted to some generic “wrongdoing” two days after *In Touch Weekly* broke the story. At that time he also stepped down from his position as the executive director of the lobbying arm of the Family Research Council, a right-wing fundamentalist Christian organization classified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. One of Josh’s job duties was to make public appearances to speak out about how marriage equality would put families and children in danger.

In June, the Fox News Channel aired an interview with Josh’s parents and two of his victims, his sisters Jessa and Jill—but not

Josh. They all downplayed his actions, and the daughters insisted that forgiving their brother was all that was needed to prevent any long-term psychological consequences. No one mentioned that one of the other victims was only five years old, and no one explained why the daughters had to show up for the interview but not the son.

Within the Quiverfull movement, and Christian fundamentalism in general, this is not an isolated incident. These communities teach an extreme form of abstinence-only sex education where holding hands is not allowed until you’re engaged, and even kissing must wait until marriage.

Vyckie Garrison is the founder of No Longer Quivering, a blog for women who have left the Quiverfull movement in order to escape the physical and mental abuse inherent in this way of life. In an online interview she said, “This is not an uncommon occurrence in Quiverfull families. The isolation, keeping children from actual education about sex, all of these things build up a culture in which it’s hard to even say what’s happening. There would be a lot of self-doubts, there would be a lot of self-blame, and there would be a lot of victim-blaming” (“Inside the Christian Cult That Told the Duggars to Blame Their Daughters for Their Abuse” by Scott Bixby, Mic.com, May 23, 2015).

And this is exactly what we saw. In the Fox News interview, Jim Bob said that “at least it wasn’t rape.” Well, that’s not for Jim Bob or us to decide. But there is no getting around the fact that Josh’s actions were incestuous. Let me take a moment here to

***Josh stepped down from the Family Research Council, an organization***



## ***They have capitalized on the myth that they and their children enjoy consistently wholesome camaraderie, compatibility, and cooperation.***

point out that Jim Bob (who served in the Arkansas House of Representatives from 1998 to 2002) made an unsuccessful bid to be the 2002 Republican primary candidate for U.S. Senator from Arkansas. On his campaign website, he had this to say: “Rape and incest represent heinous crimes and as such should be treated as capital crimes.” In other words, if you commit incest, you should get the death penalty ([TinyURL.com/JimBobIncest](http://TinyURL.com/JimBobIncest)). Keep in mind that he was campaigning on this platform while he knew about his own son’s behavior.

Through subsequent news reports, we learned that Jim Bob decided to keep Josh at home, where he continued to live with his victims. When Josh fondled the girls again, his parents sought out their own style of counseling, which consisted of conversations with church elders and sending Josh away to stay with a family friend who was remodeling a building in Little Rock. After Josh returned home from his “treatment,” he and his father reported the sexual abuse to Arkansas State Trooper Joseph Truman Hutchens, who gave Josh a “very stern talk.” Hutchens is currently serving a 56-year prison sentence for possessing, distributing, and viewing child pornography.

As the story unfolded, the Duggars received plenty of online support from other apologists for the Quiverfull movement. Here’s one Christian blogger’s spin, which includes the claim that being given comprehensive sex education is actually worse than fondling your sister:

Yes, all teenage boys struggle with the sexual transition through adolescence. Yes, sometimes this manifests itself in inappropriate ways, even among homeschooled families like the Duggars. Yes, Josh’s behavior was creepy and sinful. But frankly, what Josh actually did is a heck of a lot less evil than the systematic indoctrination of our high-schoolers in the acceptance of every fornication and perversion under the sun. There are things he could have done that would have warranted an immediate police investigation and justly put him behind bars. And had he been attending public school, who knows how many of them he might have already learned about from his peers? If anything, the fact that he was not being sent to school should be regarded as a blessing. The fact that he was instinctively experimenting with inappropriate touching made it all the more vital that he be kept as far away from that kind of information as possible (“A Few Thoughts on the Duggar Debacle,” [YankeeGospelGirl.com](http://YankeeGospelGirl.com), May 26, 2015).

Yankee Gospel Girl isn’t alone. Eric Hovind is the founder and president of Creation Today, which is, according to their website, “an apologetics ministry devoted to the war against evolution and humanism.” He said this about Duggar’s actions: “[A]s a young teen, Josh fondled girls, which could damage their trust of men, which could damage their future marriage, which could damage their future family” (“Shocking News: Josh Duggar is a Sinner—Why I Love Josh Duggar,” [CreationToday.org](http://CreationToday.org), May 23, 2015).

Hovind is not lamenting any psychological damage done to the girls. He’s lamenting that this will be a disadvantage to their husbands because a woman who doesn’t trust men can’t be a submissive wife, and a wife who has trouble being submissive won’t be able to raise a good Christian family.

Hovind’s own good Christian father is evangelist Kent Hovind, who was sentenced to ten years in prison in 2006 for tax

fraud. Last year, he was also indicted for mail fraud and criminal contempt. On July 8 of this year, he was released from prison to begin one month of home confinement and three years of probation. Eric Hovind posted the happy event on his Facebook page and included a photo of his smiling dad riding home in the backseat of a van. Seated next to him along for the trip is none other than Jim Bob Duggar.

In late July, TLC finally canceled *19 Kids and Counting*. But they also announced plans for a new documentary about child sexual abuse to educate its viewers on just how serious the problem is. That would be a good thing, but at this writing, the network plans to include both Jill (who, at twenty-four, is married with a baby boy) and Jessa (who is now twenty-two, married, and due to give birth to her first baby in November) in the program.

“Josh was a boy, a young boy in puberty, and a little too curious about girls,” Jessa said to Fox News. “And that got him into some trouble. And he made some bad choices, but, really, the extent of it was mild—inappropriate touching on fully clothed victims, most of it while [the] girls were sleeping.” These are not simply “bad choices” and Josh was not just “a little too curious.” Josh was a minor who needed serious help and didn’t receive it. These young women should not be given any more television airtime to defend their brother.

The Duggars continue to maintain their online presence through websites and social media. They went on YouTube to joyfully announce the July birth of Josh’s fourth child, a girl, who joins a sister and two brothers. The baby’s parents and grandparents are making it perfectly clear that they have not altered any of their views on religion, education, sex, or parenting.

Last August, Michelle Duggar was busy recording a robocall sent to the households of Fayetteville, Arkansas. In it, she urges voters to speak out against a proposed city ordinance that would protect LGBTs from discrimination, claiming that equal rights exposes women and children to sexual predators. You can read the entire transcript and listen to the call in an article from *The Washington Post* at [TinyURL.com/RoboMichelle](http://TinyURL.com/RoboMichelle). She unconscionably misrepresented the issue when she said, “I doubt that Fayetteville parents would stand for a law that would endanger their daughters or allow them to be traumatized by a man joining them in their private space. We should never place the preference of an adult over the safety and innocence of a child.”

That TLC *even considered* using the Duggars and their point of view in a documentary about sexual abuse is the height of irresponsibility.

Dan Arel is an award-winning journalist and the author of *Parenting Without God*. You can read his blog at [Danthropology.net](http://Danthropology.net). His Twitter handle is @DanArel.

## ***classified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.***

Review:

# Atheist Comedian Eddie Izzard's *Force Majeure*

by Becky Garrison

Celebrated as a national treasure in the United Kingdom, Eddie Izzard claims the moniker of actor, comic, marathon-runner, and aspiring politician. A very short list of his acting credits include *Hannibal* and *United States of Tara* on television; *Valkyrie*, *Ocean's Twelve*, and *Ocean's Thirteen* on the big screen; and the David Mamet plays *Race* and *The Cryptogram* on stage. In 2012, Izzard spoke at the the Reason Rally, in Washington, D.C., a gathering on the National Mall of 20,000 Atheists, humanists, and freethinkers co-sponsored by American Atheists.

This summer in Portland, I had the opportunity to see Izzard during the U.S. leg of his *Force Majeure* world tour. In his previous stand-up show, *Stripped*, Izzard went gonzo against god, speculating on what the creator would say about biblical history—"Sorry about the slavery. Couldn't get the staff. They seemed to like it."—and asking questions like, "If there was a God, don't you think he would have flicked Hitler's head off?"

***Charles the First said he was appointed by God! We cut***





## Izzard interprets “Hallelujah!” along the lines of “Yabba-dabba-do!”

This time around, he adopts a more playful riff. *Force Majeure* opens with him pointing out the difference between a human sacrifice (performed to appease a god and therefore a good thing) and murder. And then there’s execution: “Charles the First claimed the kingships of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. And he said he was appointed by God! We cut his head off, nothing happened, so apparently not.” Then he moved into his interpretation of a crazed Martin Luther ranting in German as he nails his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of Wittenberg’s Castle Church. Like many of Izzard’s routines, the humor comes not from individual jokes but his surreal, revisionist take on world history.

Other historical characters parodied include Constantine, whom Izzard critiques for his move away from multiple gods toward one God. While Izzard calls Constantine’s actions “bullshit,” he does cite the benefits of god-consolidation. “Do you spend many hours every day praying to Jeff, the god of sandwiches, Roger, the god of baked potatoes, Kenneth, the god of helicopters, and Chavaugh, the god of dangerous spelling?” Izzard offers an easy, fail-safe solution: “For one easy prayer every day, you can pray for helicopters, sandwiches, baked potatoes, and dangerous spelling. Don’t get let down piecemeal by multiple gods not answering your prayers one by one. Why not get let down in one big go by the Christian God not answering your prayers?”

Other ridiculed rituals include the Christian use of “Hallelujah!” Izzard interprets the word as being along the lines of “Yabba-dabba-do!” which for him means “many positive things.” Here Izzard doesn’t damn those who believe. Rather, he observes that replacing “God” with “humanity” conveys the same meaning of “doing good”—sans the religious baggage.

Those familiar with Izzard’s work will revel in his recreation

### ***The fight ends when god is revealed to be Steve from catering.***

of the Death Star Canteen, though this time he adds in a religious twist. God, the self-choosing chosen one, meets Lord Vader. In this segment, Izzard reinforces humanity’s need for god to have a commanding voice similar to Darth Vader, as opposed to the high-pitch squeals of a Catholic choir boy. Instead of battling the dark forces of evil, these two overlords fight over who gets the last spaghetti a la carbonara. The fight ends when God is revealed to be Steve from catering, the guy who saved the day in the original Death Star Canteen skit by



Eddie Izzard at Reason Rally, Washington, D.C., 2012

Photo above by John Welte, photo at left by Amanda Searle

throwing cafeteria trays. The two men agree to share their spaghetti a la carbonara, and life returns to the surreal state of equilibrium that has come to define Izzard’s humor.

With his U.S. tour concluded in September, he headed to France for a series of shows in September and October, which he will perform in French. He’s also announced plans to learn Spanish, Russian, and Arabic so that he can perform the show in even more parts of the world.

Izzard fans may be lamenting his promised disappearance from the world of entertainment as he prepares to run for either Mayor of London, or possibly a seat in Parliament, in 2020. But with a number of projects in the works, including the dramatic film *Boychoir*, the animated film *Tibetan Rock Dog*, the science-fiction comedy *Absolutely Anything* written and directed by Monty Python alum Terry Jones, and a talent-holding deal with NBC, Izzard hasn’t sung his final swan song.

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Go to [Eddielizzard.com](http://Eddielizzard.com) for news, photos, merchandise, emailed updates, and to download nine of his stand-up shows on iTunes.

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Becky Garrison is a satirist and storyteller. To learn more about her projects, go to [BeckyGarrison.com](http://BeckyGarrison.com) or @Becky\_Garrison on Twitter.

## ***his head off, nothing happened, so apparently not.***

# Is Science Too Hard to Understand? Try Religion

by Macey Hickman



Macey Hickman

As a senior seminar instructor at a small public school in rural Ohio, I assign monthly prompts to my twelfth-graders to solicit deep, reflective thoughts involving personal, academic, and social issues. I select essay topics to engage not only intellectual, critical, and creative thinking, but also to measure academic potential through collegiate writing. I hope to prepare students for a world where they must reflect on their lives, make their own decisions, pass their own judgments, and act on what matters most to them.

Sometimes, a student is passionate about a cause that isn't popular, so these assignments give students a chance to voice what they are passionate about, even when their beliefs put them in the minority. Macey Hickman wrote this critical, in-your-face, bold, and brave essay before she graduated last year. This was the assignment: "Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again? What outcome did you see? How will you advocate for your ideas? What kind of changes positive and negative could come from your profession of this belief or idea?"

Readers of this magazine can rest assured that the mission of American Atheists has reached all the way to our small school. ~ Mariel Sobel

**Disclaimer: If you are easily offended and in any way devoted to the Christian faith, I suggest not reading this.**

Atheism is the rejection of belief in the existence of deities. In other words, it is thinking for yourself. Despite popular belief, I am truly in support of religious freedom and respect all religions until they begin negatively affecting others. Based on my own personal experiences, Christians have used their self-help book to not only revoke basic human rights from citizens, but they've also murdered people in the name of it. Christianity instills fear into the minds of those who participate in it. Despite your creed, more people have been slaughtered in the name of religion than anything else, and that is repulsive. If I were to spend one day doing absolutely anything I desired, I would put

an end to Christianity.

Regardless of who you speak to, Christianity is always going to trace back to one item in particular, and that is my favorite fictional book: the Bible. It's typically the most recommended book by Atheists because it is pure boredom laced with ridiculousness. I stand in awe of the all-time novel of false promises and exaggerated claims. Not only has this book convinced people that there's an invisible man living in the sky watching all of our actions without exception, but it's also convinced people that if they don't follow his list of rules, they'll be sent beneath the ground to a place of outer darkness where you'll know nothing besides pain, suffering, burning, choking, screaming, and eternal agony...but he loves you

***Nowhere in these commandments is there a condemnation of slavery, genocide, child-molestation, or cruel treatment of homosexuals.***



# ***What you don't see are people praying for anything that actually requires a supernatural force.***

with all his heart. Nowhere in these commandments is there a condemnation of slavery, genocide, child-molestation, or cruel treatment of homosexuals or non-human animals, but it does suggest that a wife is the property of the husband. Not only is the Bible misogynistic, egocentric, homophobic, and riddled with contradictions, but the entire religion itself radiates sexual misery. Until I reached the age of reason, I also believed in this god that lacked legitimacy—and in his insanity.

I tolerate the simple fact that certain beings rely on religion as a safe haven or a permanent comfort zone. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with seeking help when it is needed. There is nothing wrong with being devoted to a deity—until it begins having a negative impact on another human being. Over the past several centuries, Christianity has assisted in actions ranging from the prevention of homosexual marriages to taking millions of innocent lives over the past several centuries. By dedicating themselves to science, some human beings have flown to the moon. By devoting themselves to religious text, others have flown into buildings.

If God were truly genuine in existence, why would he allow so many false religions to flourish? You have millions of people who feign the existence of another father and pray to someone who does not exist. What you don't see are people praying for anything that actually requires a supernatural force. Christians don't pray for the life of the deceased to be reinstated, for an amputee to have a limb restored, or to have the capability to fly. They know just as much as we do that prayer doesn't actually work, which is why they only use it in situations that will inevitably produce a positive outcome.

Christians follow the rules in the Bible because they fear a sinister afterlife. Yet if they so fear what will happen to them once they are six feet below the ground, why do they stand oblivious to so many rules? Since when were we granted the ability to deregulate such a sacred book? For example, John 6:27 says, "Don't work to obtain food." Regardless of what an ancient fictional book discloses, it's beyond the limits of possibility to live in this world without working to obtain food. Matthew 6:19-20 says not to save money or become wealthy. These two rules are strikingly humorous, considering that many Bible-thumping people are disgustingly rich and act lackadaisically toward anyone below them. Yet caring for the less needy sounds like something Jesus would do if he had actually existed. Luke 6:30 says, "If someone steals from you, don't try to get it back." If this one is sincerely accurate, and we are not supposed to seek out those who did us wrong, then why did America's Founding Fathers ever establish a government in the first place?

Matthew 5:28 says not to have sexual urges. If humans weren't suppose to have sexual urges and sex was strictly made for reproductive purposes, then why does a woman's body have a clitoris containing over eight thousand sensory nerve endings that don't rest? If this is surely sinful, then why, in some cultures, when a girl is wearing less than a sleeping bag or a snowsuit, is she requesting rape? According to this

mindset, men are incapable of controlling themselves around even the most pre-pubescent girls whose thighs are showing. It doesn't matter if they're five or seventeen, as long as the rapist knows he can overpower his victim.

If we are prohibited from having sexual urges, then it is absurd to ever blame a victim of rape because the man himself should've felt remorseful for even becoming aroused, let alone towards a child. It doesn't even matter if you believe it was the victim's fault because according to the Bible, the woman must then marry her rapist: "If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay her father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the young woman, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives" (Deuteronomy 22:28-29). Except she can't marry him because we must stone her for having sex out of wedlock, according to Deuteronomy 22:21. I suppose the woman must've been asking for the rocks, too.

Out of the limitless controversies defended by the Bible, one specifically hinders me deeply. Those who are "pro-life" (and anti-woman) persistently use a nonexistent god as an excuse to oppose the expulsion of a fetus. Somehow, they believe a fetus is a human being and argue for the sanctity of life. The only people to ever argue the sanctity of life are those who are alive. This is self-worth, and a rather biased opinion if you ask me. If babies who pass away at birth are automatically granted access to heaven, is life truly meaningful at all?

Some "pro-lifers" foolishly presume that life begins when the sperm fertilizes the egg moments after ejaculation—assuming the man isn't wearing a condom because they also believe contraceptives are a sin. These people must have failed to ever read a science textbook (if they had, they'd be Atheists) because they are unaware that it can take up to a week for the fertilized egg to implant in the uterus. Considering that they are also against sex education, they must be naive to the fact that a woman releases fertilized eggs that didn't make it to the uterus during her period. Are they implying that every woman to ever have a period is a murderer and going straight to hell? When a man masturbates, over 180 million sperm can be released upon ejaculation. Is that 180 million abortions, all in the hands of a man? How are they against abortion clinics but completely content with a man wiping those millions of potential doctors, lawyers, politicians, teachers, or fascists onto a napkin only to flush it down the toilet? Taking this into consideration, masturbation must be outlawed, and I cannot even imagine the fate of sperm banks. There is no conventional argument against abortion, and those who use the Bible to fight it lack common sense.

Some will argue that the answer to bad religion is good religion. Personally, I do not believe in good religion, but I do think the expulsion of Christianity would generate an optimistic path for the future. Unfortunately, there will always be some that restrict themselves to Christianity, but there will always be open-minded secular humanists fighting back at them. While some will continue to preach "God bless America," I will continue to fight for a godless America. ■

This is why society will greatly benefit once critical thinking is made a part of the curriculum starting in elementary school. Imagine this as a course title for a new compulsory high school class: "The Belief in Prayer is a Superstition: An Introduction to Critical Thinking." Or what about this in middle school: "God is Imaginary: Using Critical Thinking to Understand the Real World." Or this in elementary school: "Some Things are not Real: How to Tell the Difference." In these classes, we would give students the critical-thinking tools they can use to separate fact from fiction. These tools will help them in many other areas of their lives as well.

The core idea underpinning this approach to education is simple: Religion, in large part, is a side effect of *ignorance*.<sup>5</sup> Lack of critical thinking is definitely fueling the widespread belief in prayer and many other religious tendencies. One reason why religion generally diminishes in richer, more educated societies is that the idea of religion becomes absurd to people who are better educated. Once they are able to understand and eliminate fallacies and biases, religion looks silly to many. Anyone who removes the compartmentalization that often protects religion from critical thinking will understand that religion is filled with nonsense and impossibility. Religion is rife with contradictions, which makes the whole notion ridiculous to someone who exposes religion to critical thought.

Therefore, to eliminate religion, our task is straightforward.

We need to educate our children and teenagers to the point where they can think critically for themselves and can easily see and understand the absurdity of religion. The good news is that once someone's brain is at this level of comprehension, a great many positive side effects occur. Life would be much better for everyone if everyone in our society is educated to the level where they understand that religion is absurd.

Marshall Brain is the author of *How God Works: A Logical Inquiry on Faith* and the founder of HowStuffWorks.com. He also writes extensively on a number of topics at MarshallBrain.com.

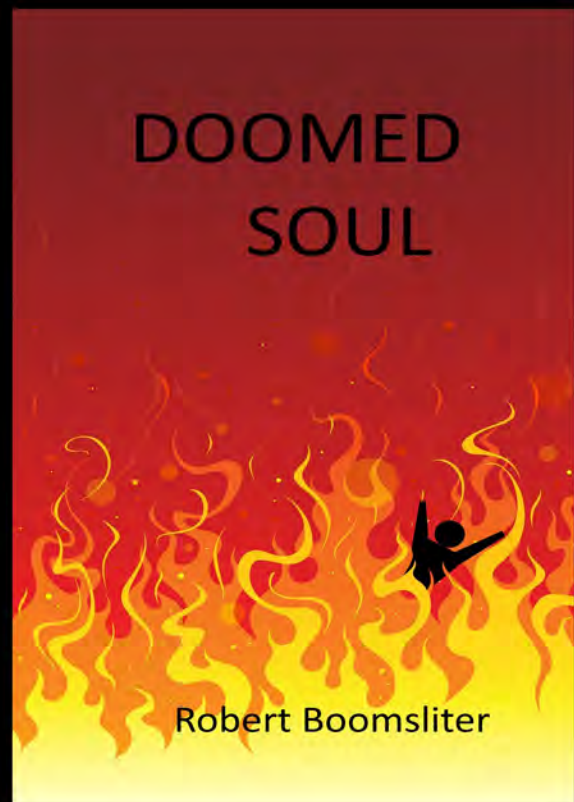
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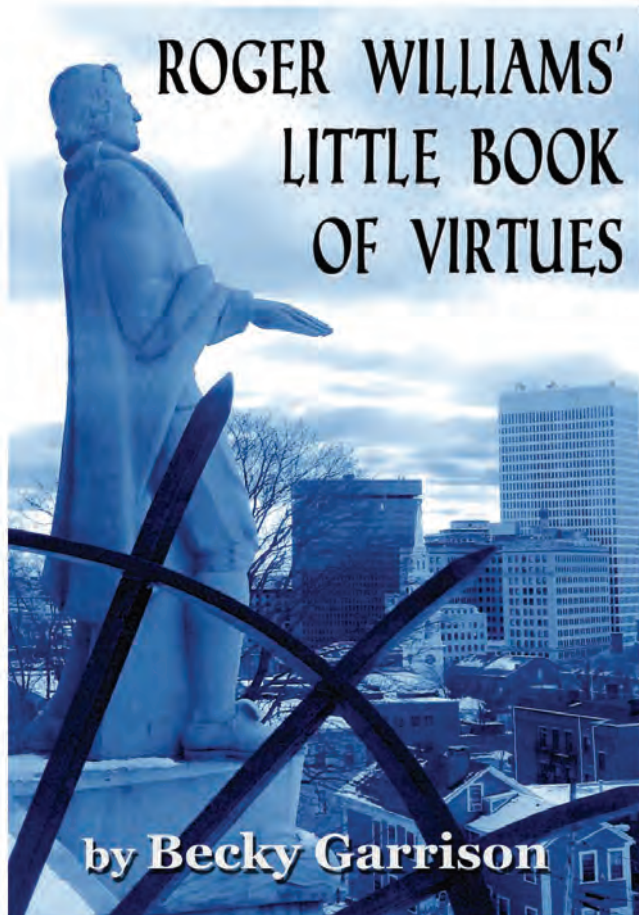
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Since the last issue of this magazine, five members of American Atheists increased their commitment by becoming Lifetime Supporters or by upgrading their Lifetime Supporter memberships. Thanks to the following for their continued support to further promote our shared goals and values:

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Sunil Deshmukh

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# IN MEMORIAM: JEANNE R. GAUDIA

## NOVEMBER 28, 1930 - JULY 23, 2015

BY GIL GAUDIA

An *American Atheist* magazine proofreader, Jeanne was a proud Life Member, activist, artist, and archery champion



**Jeanne Ruth Patricelli** was one of the most beautiful creatures to ever walk this planet. I was privileged to share seventy years of my life with her, ever since we met in 1944 at an after-school, part-time factory job in the Bronx, where we both were born. She was fourteen and I was fifteen, and we soon fell into a love that will last until I die.

On July 23, 2015, I found out how much emotional pain I could endure without literally crumbling into the molecules of which we are made, when she died at our home in Eugene, Oregon, in my arms and those of her children.

She became Jeanne R. Gaudia in 1950 and provided this world with two wonderful women, our daughters, Shelley and Amy, who, like their mother, were born into the wrong century. All three should have, and could have, been among the pioneers of the Great Migration of 1843 who crossed this continent on the Oregon Trail in covered wagons enduring pain, overcoming

obstacles, and creating beauty in many forms.

Jeanne was a beautiful artist whose creativity lives on in the many works she painted and sculpted during her career. She was also an archer who won the Senior Women's United States National Archery Championship in Tucson in 1997. Although she never killed anything with her bow, she looked like Diana the Huntress when she was at full draw.

A lifelong Atheist, she told her Italian-Catholic parents shortly after making her first communion, "I'm not going into that haunted house any more. I don't believe any of that stuff."

She aided the cause of freethought as a proofreader for this magazine and was a member of an editorial committee for The Secular Web (Infidels.org).

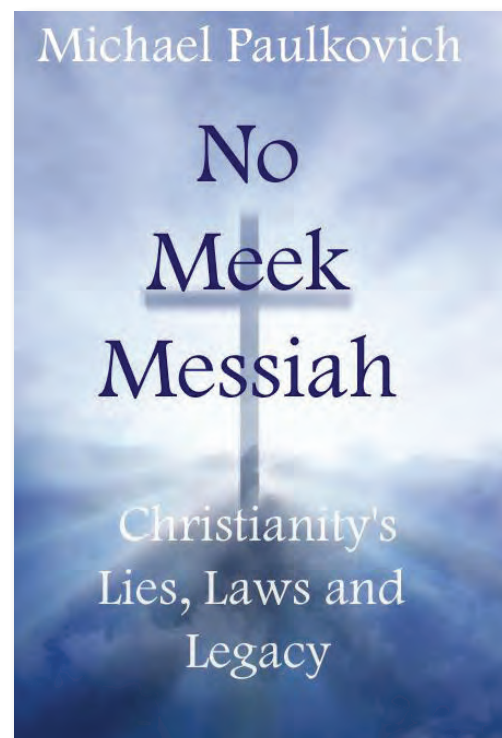
Our lives played out like a great epic movie with a lousy ending. The credits are rolling, people are shuffling out of the theater . . . I'm sweeping up the popcorn and candy wrappers . . . and crying.

### From the author of the *Dogma Watch* series in this magazine:

Religion, especially Christianity, has enjoyed unwarranted respect for far too long. Jesus did say a few nice things, but he was no humble or wise prophet. How do we know?

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MN	Minnesota Atheists	Minneapolis	<a href="http://mnatheists.org">http://mnatheists.org</a>
OK	Atheist Community of Tulsa	Tulsa	<a href="http://www.ACTOK.org">http://www.ACTOK.org</a>
PA	PA Non-Believers	York	<a href="http://www.panonbelievers.org">http://www.panonbelievers.org</a>
TX	Metroplex Atheists	Arlington	<a href="http://www.metroplexatheists.org">http://www.metroplexatheists.org</a>
<b>AFFILIATES</b>			
AK	Alaskan Atheists	Anchorage	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/AlaskanAtheists/">http://www.meetup.com/AlaskanAtheists/</a>
AL	Auburn Atheists & Agnostics	Auburn	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/groups/auburnatheistsandagnostics/">http://www.facebook.com/groups/auburnatheistsandagnostics/</a>
AL	Birmingham Atheists Meetup	Birmingham	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/atheists-132">http://www.meetup.com/atheists-132</a>
AL	Marshall County Atheists & Agnostics	Marshall	<a href="http://www.themcaa.org">http://www.themcaa.org</a>
AL	Montgomery Area Freethought Association	Montgomery	<a href="http://www.montgomeryfreethought.org">http://www.montgomeryfreethought.org</a>
AL	North Alabama Freethought Association	Huntsville	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/thenafa">http://www.meetup.com/thenafa</a>
AL	UA Alabama Atheists and Agnostics	Tuscaloosa	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2234029305">http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2234029305</a>
AL	UAH Non-Theists	Huntsville	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/uahnonthiests">http://www.facebook.com/uahnonthiests</a>
AL	West Alabama Freethought Association	Tuscaloosa	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/westalabamafreethought">http://www.meetup.com/westalabamafreethought</a>
AR	Arkansas Society of Freethinkers	Little Rock	<a href="http://www.ARFreethinkers.org">http://www.ARFreethinkers.org</a>
AR	ArkLaTex Freethinkers, Atheists, Agnostics & Humanists	Texarkana	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=128265161357">http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=128265161357</a>
AR	Southwest Arkansas Atheist Community	Nashville	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
AZ	Tucson Atheists	Tucson	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Tucson-Atheists/">http://www.meetup.com/Tucson-Atheists/</a>
CA-N	Atheist Advocates of San Francisco	San Francisco	<a href="http://atheistadvocatesofsanfrancisco.com/">http://atheistadvocatesofsanfrancisco.com/</a>
CA-N	Atheists and Other Freethinkers	Sacramento	<a href="http://aofonline.org">http://aofonline.org</a>
CA-N	Central Valley Alliance of Atheists and Skeptics	Fresno	<a href="http://www.cvaas.org">http://www.cvaas.org</a>
CA-N	Contra Costa Atheists & Freethinkers	Pleasant Hill	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Contra-Costa-Atheists-and-Freethinkers/">http://www.meetup.com/Contra-Costa-Atheists-and-Freethinkers/</a>
CA-N	East Bay Atheists	Oakland	<a href="http://www.eastbayatheists.org">http://www.eastbayatheists.org</a>
CA-N	San Francisco Atheists	San Francisco	<a href="http://www.sfatheists.com">http://www.sfatheists.com</a>
CA-N	Santa Cruz Atheists	Santa Cruz	<a href="http://santacruzatheists.org">http://santacruzatheists.org</a>
CA-S	Atheist Coalition of San Diego	San Diego	<a href="http://www.atheistcoalition.org">http://www.atheistcoalition.org</a>
CA-S	Humanist Fellowship of San Diego	San Diego	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
CA-S	Atheist Society of Kern	Bakersfield	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
CA-S	Backyard Skeptics	Villa Park	<a href="http://www.backyardskeptics.com">http://www.backyardskeptics.com</a>
CA-S	Humanist Society of Santa Barbara	Santa Barbara	<a href="http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org">http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org</a>
CA-S	New Atheists of East County	Jamul	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/New-Atheists-of-East-County/">http://www.meetup.com/New-Atheists-of-East-County/</a>
CA-S	Orange County Atheists	Orange	<a href="http://www.ocatheists.com">http://www.ocatheists.com</a>
CA-S	Riverside Atheists and Free Thinkers	Norco	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
CO	Atheists and Freethinkers of Denver	Denver	<a href="http://athofden.tripod.com">http://athofden.tripod.com</a>
CO	Boulder Atheists	Boulder	<a href="http://www.boulderatheists.org">http://www.boulderatheists.org</a>
CO	Metro State Atheists	Denver	<a href="http://metrostateatheists.wordpress.com">http://metrostateatheists.wordpress.com</a>



CO	Pikes Peak Atheists	Colorado Springs	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
CO	Western Colorado Atheists & Freethinkers	Grand Junction	<a href="http://westerncoloradoatheists.org">http://westerncoloradoatheists.org</a>
CT	Atheist Humanist Society of CT and RI	Norwich	<a href="http://atheisthumanist.org">http://atheisthumanist.org</a>
CT	Connecticut Valley Atheists	South Windsor	<a href="http://www.cvatheists.org">http://www.cvatheists.org</a>
DC	American University Rationalists and Atheists	Washington	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=34367344446">http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=34367344446</a>
DC	Washington Area Secular Humanists	Washington	<a href="http://www.wash.org">http://www.wash.org</a>
FL	Central Florida Secular Alliance	Dunnellon	<a href="http://cfsecularalliance.weebly.com">http://cfsecularalliance.weebly.com</a>
FL	Florida Atheists, Critical Thinkers & Skeptics	Longwood/ Orlando	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Critical">http://www.meetup.com/Critical</a>
FL	Gator Freethought (UF)	Gainesville	<a href="http://www.gatorfreethought.com/">http://www.gatorfreethought.com/</a>
FL	North Florida Atheists	Starke	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/north-Florida-atheists">http://www.meetup.com/north-Florida-atheists</a>
FL	Ocala Atheists	Ocala	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Ocala-Atheists/">http://www.meetup.com/Ocala-Atheists/</a>
FL	Rebirth of Reason	Orlando	<a href="http://rebirthofreason.com/Florida">http://rebirthofreason.com/Florida</a>
FL	Sarasota-Manatee Atheists & Secular Humanists (SMASH)	Nokomis	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
FL	Secular Student Association at Univ. of Central FL	Orlando	<a href="http://ssaucf.com">http://ssaucf.com</a>
FL	Humanist Community of the Space Coast	Satellite Beach	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
FL	St. Petersburg Atheists Freethought Group	St. Petersburg	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/atheists-209">http://www.meetup.com/atheists-209</a>
FL	Tallahassee Atheists	Tallahassee	<a href="http://www.tallahasseeatheists.com/">http://www.tallahasseeatheists.com/</a>
FL	Treasure Coast Atheists	Stuart	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/atheists-600">http://www.meetup.com/atheists-600</a>
FL	Williston Atheists	Morrison	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
GA	Albany Georgia Atheists	Albany	<a href="http://www.albanygeorgiaatheists.com/">http://www.albanygeorgiaatheists.com/</a>
GA	Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta	Atlanta	<a href="http://www.blacknonbelievers.org">http://www.blacknonbelievers.org</a>
GA	Fayette Freethought Society	Peachtree City	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Fayette-Freethought-Society">http://www.meetup.com/Fayette-Freethought-Society</a>
GA	Kennesaw State U. Student Coalition for Inquiry	Kennesaw	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/ksusci">http://www.facebook.com/ksusci</a>
GA	Macon Atheists & Secular Humanists	Macon	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/georgiamash/">http://www.meetup.com/georgiamash/</a>
IA	Atheists United for a Rational America	Iowa City	<a href="http://rationalamerica.com">http://rationalamerica.com</a>
IA	Iowa Atheists & Freethinkers	Des Moines	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Iowa-Atheists-and-Freethinkers">http://www.meetup.com/Iowa-Atheists-and-Freethinkers</a>
IL	Chicagoland Freethinkers	Chicago	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/chicago-freethought/">http://www.meetup.com/chicago-freethought/</a>
IL	The Chicago Freethought Project	Chicago	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/thechicagofreethoughtproject">http://www.facebook.com/thechicagofreethoughtproject</a>
IL	IL/WI Stateline Atheists Society	Rockford	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/statelineatheists">http://www.meetup.com/statelineatheists</a>
IL	IWU Atheist, Agnostics, and Non-Religious	Bloomington	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5558627959">http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5558627959</a>
IL	The Secular Segment	Mt. Vernon	<a href="http://www.secularsegment.com">http://www.secularsegment.com</a>
KS	U of K Society of Open-Minded Atheists & Agnostics	Lawrence	<a href="http://www.kusoma.org">http://www.kusoma.org</a>
KY	Humanist Forum of Central Kentucky	Lexington	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/groups/kyhumanists/">http://www.facebook.com/groups/kyhumanists/</a>
KY	Lexington Atheists	Lexington	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/The-Lexington-Atheists-Meetup-Group">http://www.meetup.com/The-Lexington-Atheists-Meetup-Group</a>
KY	Louisville Atheists and Freethinkers	Louisville	<a href="http://www.louisvilleatheists.com/">http://www.louisvilleatheists.com/</a>
KY	Tri-State Freethinkers (KY, IN, OH)	Union	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Tri-State-Freethinkers/">http://www.meetup.com/Tri-State-Freethinkers/</a>
LA	New Orleans Secular Humanist Association	New Orleans	<a href="http://nosha.org">http://nosha.org</a>
MA	Atheists of Greater Lowell	Lowell	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/lowellatheists">http://www.meetup.com/lowellatheists</a>
MA	Boston Atheists	Boston	<a href="http://bostonatheists.org">http://bostonatheists.org</a>
MD	Freethinkers Union at McDaniel College	Westminster	<none>
MD	Maryland Freethinkers	Annapolis	<a href="http://www.mdfreethinkers.com">http://www.mdfreethinkers.com</a>
ME	Maine Atheists and Humanists	Waterville	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>

# AFFILIATES AND LOCAL PARTNERS

MI	Atheists @ Oakland University	Rochester	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/AtheistsAtOU">http://www.facebook.com/AtheistsAtOU</a>
MI	Michigan Atheists	Detroit	<a href="http://michiganatheists.org">http://michiganatheists.org</a>
MI	Mid-Michigan Atheists & Humanists	Lansing	<a href="http://www.mmah.org">http://www.mmah.org</a>
MN	Atheists for Human Rights	Minneapolis	<a href="http://atheistsforhumanrights.org">http://atheistsforhumanrights.org</a>
MN	Campus Atheists Skeptics & Humanists	Minneapolis	<a href="http://cashumn.org">http://cashumn.org</a>
MO	Black Freethinkers of Kansas City	Kansas City	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Black-FreeThinkers-of-KC/">http://www.meetup.com/Black-FreeThinkers-of-KC/</a>
MO	Columbia Atheists	Columbia	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/The-Columbia-Atheists-Meetup-Group">http://www.meetup.com/The-Columbia-Atheists-Meetup-Group</a>
MO	Joplin Freethinkers	Joplin	<a href="http://www.joplinfreethinkers.org">http://www.joplinfreethinkers.org</a>
MO	Kansas City Atheist Coalition	Kansas City	<a href="http://www.kcatheists.org">http://www.kcatheists.org</a>
MO	MU Skeptics, Atheists, Secular Humanists & Agnostics	Columbia	<a href="http://muSASHA.org">http://muSASHA.org</a>
MO	O'Fallon Freethinkers	O'Fallon	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/OFallon-Freethinkers">http://www.meetup.com/OFallon-Freethinkers</a>
MO	Rationalist Society of St. Louis	St. Louis	<a href="http://www.rssl.org">http://www.rssl.org</a>
MO	Secular Student Alliance @ UCMO	Warrensburg	<a href="http://www.centuralskeptics.org">http://www.centuralskeptics.org</a>
MO	Springfield Freethinkers	Springfield	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/SpringfieldFreethinkers">http://www.meetup.com/SpringfieldFreethinkers</a>
MO	Springfield Skeptics	Springfield	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
MO	St. Joseph Skeptics	St. Joseph	<a href="http://stjosephskeptics.org">http://stjosephskeptics.org</a>
MO	We Are Atheism	Grandview	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
MS	Humanist Ethical Atheist Rational Thought Society	Biloxi	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/HeartsOfTheSouth">http://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/HeartsOfTheSouth</a>
MS	Great Southern Humanist Society	Biloxi	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/southernatheist">http://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/southernatheist</a>
NC	A-News	Raleigh	<a href="http://www.apartmentJ.com">http://www.apartmentJ.com</a>
NC	Charlotte Atheists & Agnostics	Charlotte	<a href="http://www.charlotteatheists.com">http://www.charlotteatheists.com</a>
NC	Hickory Humanist Alliance	Claremont	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
NC	MASH Ft. Bragg	Fayetteville	<a href="http://www.mashfortbragg.org">http://www.mashfortbragg.org</a>
NC	WNC Humanists	Fairview	<a href="http://www.wnchumanists.org">http://www.wnchumanists.org</a>
ND	Red River Freethinkers	Fargo	<a href="http://redriverfreethinkers.org">http://redriverfreethinkers.org</a>
NE	Lincoln Atheists	Lincoln	<a href="http://www.lincolnatheists.org">http://www.lincolnatheists.org</a>
NE	Omaha Atheists	Omaha	<a href="http://omahaatheists.org/">http://omahaatheists.org/</a>
NJ	Camden County Humanists	Blackwood	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
NJ	New Jersey Humanist Network	Somerville	<a href="http://njhn.org/">http://njhn.org/</a>
NJ	Secular Student Alliance @ Montclair State Univ.	Montclair	<a href="http://secularstudents.org/montclair">http://secularstudents.org/montclair</a>
NJ	South Jersey Humanists	Oceanville	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
NJ	William Paterson Univ. Secular Student Alliance	Pompton Lakes	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/SSA.WPUNJ">https://www.facebook.com/SSA.WPUNJ</a>
NM	Roswatheists	Roswell	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Roswatheists">http://www.meetup.com/Roswatheists</a>
NM	Atheist Community of Santa Fe	Santa Fe	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
NV	Reno Freethinkers	Reno	<a href="http://www.RenoFreethinkers.org">http://www.RenoFreethinkers.org</a>
NY	Freethinkers of Upstate New York	Syracuse	<a href="http://www.funnygroup.org">http://www.funnygroup.org</a>
NY	Hudson Valley Humanists	Saugerties	<a href="http://hudsonvalley.humanists.net">http://hudsonvalley.humanists.net</a>
NY	Long Island Atheist Meetup	Lynbrook	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
NY	New York City Atheists	New York	<a href="http://nyc-atheists.org">http://nyc-atheists.org</a>
NY	Westchester Atheists	Chappaqua	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/atheists-504">http://www.meetup.com/atheists-504</a>
OH	Free Inquiry Group	Cincinnati	<a href="http://www.gofigger.org">http://www.gofigger.org</a>
OH	Freethought Dayton	Dayton	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/freethoughtdayton">http://www.meetup.com/freethoughtdayton</a>



OH	Humanist Community of Central Ohio	Columbus	<a href="http://www.hcco.org">http://www.hcco.org</a>
OH	Mid-Ohio Atheists	Mansfield	<a href="http://midohioatheists.org">http://midohioatheists.org</a>
OK	Atheist Community of Tulsa	Tulsa	<a href="http://www.ACTOK.org">http://www.ACTOK.org</a>
OK	Oklahoma Atheists	Oklahoma City	<a href="http://www.oklahomaaatheists.com">http://www.oklahomaaatheists.com</a>
PA	NEPA Freethought Society	Wilkes-Barre	<a href="http://www.nepafreethought.org">http://www.nepafreethought.org</a>
SC	Piedmont Humanists	Greenville	<a href="http://www.PiedmontHumanists.org">http://www.PiedmontHumanists.org</a>
SC	Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry	Charleston	<a href="http://www.lowcountryhumanists.org">http://www.lowcountryhumanists.org</a>
SC	Upstate Atheists	Boiling Springs	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
TN	Memphis Atheists	Memphis	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
TN	Memphis Freethought Alliance	Memphis	<a href="http://memphisfreethought.com">http://memphisfreethought.com</a>
TN	Nashville Secular Life	Nashville	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/secularlife">http://www.meetup.com/secularlife</a>
TN	Rationalists of East Tennessee	Knoxville	<a href="http://www.rationalists.org">http://www.rationalists.org</a>
TX	Atheist Community of Austin	Austin	<a href="http://atheist-community.org">http://atheist-community.org</a>
TX	Corpus Christi Atheists	Corpus Christi	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/CCAtheists">http://www.meetup.com/CCAtheists</a>
TX	Denton Atheists	Denton	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/The-Denton-Atheists-Meetup-Group">http://www.meetup.com/The-Denton-Atheists-Meetup-Group</a>
TX	El Paso Atheists	El Paso	<a href="http://www.elpasoatheists.com">http://www.elpasoatheists.com</a>
TX	Freethinkers Association of Central Texas	San Antonio	<a href="http://FreethinkersACT.org">http://FreethinkersACT.org</a>
TX	Freethought Oasis of Amarillo	Amarillo	<a href="http://freethoughtoasis.org">http://freethoughtoasis.org</a>
TX	Golden Triangle Freethinkers	Beaumont	<a href="http://goldentrianglefreethinkers.org">http://goldentrianglefreethinkers.org</a>
TX	Houston Atheists	Houston	<a href="http://HoustonAtheists.org">http://HoustonAtheists.org</a>
TX	Kingwood Humble Atascocita Atheists	Atascocita	<a href="http://www.kha-atheists.org/">http://www.kha-atheists.org/</a>
TX	Lubbock Atheists	Lubbock	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/atheists-496">http://www.meetup.com/atheists-496</a>
TX	Secular Humanist Society of East Texas	Nacagdoches	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
TX	UNT Freethought Alliance	Denton	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7647566521">http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7647566521</a>
TX	Wise Free Thinkers and Skeptics	Wise	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Wise-Free-Thinkers-and-Skeptics">http://www.meetup.com/Wise-Free-Thinkers-and-Skeptics</a>
UT	Atheists of Utah	Salt Lake City	<a href="http://atheistsofutah.org">http://atheistsofutah.org</a>
UT	Salt Lake Valley Atheists	Salt Lake City	<a href="http://nowscape.com/a">http://nowscape.com/a</a>
VA	Beltway Atheists	Leesburg	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Beltway-Atheists-Inc">http://www.meetup.com/Beltway-Atheists-Inc</a>
VA	NOVA Atheists	Leesburg	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/NOVA-Atheists">http://www.meetup.com/NOVA-Atheists</a>
VT	Atheists of Rutland Vermont	Rutland	<a href="http://www.atheistsofrutlandvt.com/">http://www.atheistsofrutlandvt.com/</a>
WA	Seattle Atheists	Seattle	<a href="http://www.seattleatheists.org">http://www.seattleatheists.org</a>
WA	Tri-City Freethinkers	Pasco	<a href="http://www.tricityfreethinkers.org">http://www.tricityfreethinkers.org</a>
WI	Southeast Wisconsin FreeThinkers	Milwaukee	<a href="http://swiftnow.org">http://swiftnow.org</a>
WV	Kanawha Valley Atheists and Agnostics	Charleston	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
WV	Mountain State Freethinkers	Martinsville	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Mountain-State-Freethinkers">http://www.meetup.com/Mountain-State-Freethinkers</a>
WV	Morgantown Atheists	Morgantown	<a href="http://www.morgantownatheists.com">http://www.morgantownatheists.com</a>
US	Atheist Nexus		<a href="http://www.atheistnexus.org">http://www.atheistnexus.org</a>
US	Black Atheists of America		<a href="http://www.blackatheistsofamerica.org">http://www.blackatheistsofamerica.org</a>
US	Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers		<a href="http://www.militaryatheistsorg">http://www.militaryatheistsorg</a>
Intl	Southeast Asia Freethought Association		
Intl	Ateistas de Puerto Rico	San Juan	<a href="http://goo.gl/K2koj">http://goo.gl/K2koj</a>
Intl	Philippine Atheists and Agnostics Society		<a href="http://www.patas.co">http://www.patas.co</a>

# AIMS AND PURPOSES



American Atheists, Inc. is a nonprofit, nonpolitical, educational organization dedicated to the complete and absolute separation of state and church, accepting the explanation of Thomas Jefferson that the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was meant to create a 'wall of separation' between state and church.

## American Atheists is organized:

- To stimulate and promote freedom of thought and inquiry concerning religious beliefs, creeds, dogmas, tenets, rituals, and practices;
- To collect and disseminate information, data, and literature on all religions and promote a more thorough understanding of them, their origins, and their histories;
- To advocate, labor for, and promote in all lawful ways the complete and absolute separation of state and church;
- To act as a 'watchdog' to challenge any attempted breach of the wall of separation between state and church;
- To advocate, labor for, and promote in all lawful ways the establishment and maintenance of a thoroughly secular system of education available to all;
- To encourage the development and public acceptance of a humane ethical system stressing the mutual sympathy, understanding, and interdependence of all people and the corresponding responsibility of each individual in relation to society;
- To develop and propagate a social philosophy in which humankind is central and must itself be the source of strength, progress, and ideals for the well-being and happiness of humanity;
- To promote the study of the arts and sciences and of all problems affecting the maintenance, perpetuation, and enrichment of human (and other) life; and
- To engage in such social, educational, legal, and cultural activity as will be useful and beneficial to the members of American Atheists and to society as a whole.

## Definitions:

Atheism is the comprehensive world view of persons who are free from theism and have freed themselves of supernatural beliefs altogether. It is predicated on ancient Greek Materialism.

Atheism involves the mental attitude that unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a lifestyle and ethical outlook verifiable by experience and the scientific method, independent of all arbitrary assumptions of authority and creeds.

Materialism declares that the cosmos is devoid of immanent conscious purpose; that it is governed by its own inherent, immutable, and impersonal laws; that there is no supernatural interference in human life; that humankind, finding the resources within themselves, can and must create their own destiny. It teaches that we must prize our life on earth and strive always to improve it. It holds that human beings are capable of creating a social system based on reason and justice. Materialism's 'faith' is in humankind and their ability to transform the world culture by their own efforts. This is a commitment that is, in its very essence, life-asserting. It considers the struggle for progress as a moral obligation that is impossible without noble ideas that inspire us to bold, creative works.

Materialism holds that our potential for good and more fulfilling cultural development is, for all practical purposes, unlimited.



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# Why I Am An Atheist

by Damien Lee Thor

“Because I trusted the adults in my life, I assumed that they had evidence for god.”

I was born in New York of 100-percent Iberian blood and raised overseas. I re-emigrated back into the United States at age fifteen when I learned to speak English. I was raised Catholic by my grandparents who wanted me to pursue the priesthood. It was discussed without me and chosen for me, very much like an arranged marriage. I accepted this because I was a child, and children trust the people around them.

I also accepted other things that were taught to me, like that the Bible was written under direct instruction from god and that the New Testament is an eyewitness account by Jesus' apostles. Because I trusted the adults in my life, I assumed that they had evidence for god.

I started to question things when I was seven years old. It began at one of the prayer meetings that my grandmother would bring me to. The topic was faith—specifically, why they believed in god when no one has ever seen god. It was very clear to me, even at age seven, that in order for this god to be possible, one had to accept a fantasy. As I grew up, my doubts turned into non-belief, and for a long time, I thought I was the only Atheist on the planet.

Prior to entering the seminary, I did a lot of research at the local library and school libraries. I read as many books as I could about ancient history, archaeology, anthropology, and the origins of myth and religions. I learned that the man who assembled what we know today as the New Testament was Athanasius, a fourth-century theologian from Egypt. I was very curious as to why he left out so much scripture, such as the Gospels of Judas, Thomas, and Mary Magdalene, to name a few, and why the Gospels he did include contradict one other.

I entered the seminary right after high school. I had no desire to become a priest, but I did have a lot of questions. I wanted palpable evidence for god—not the usual religious regurgitations of sermons and biblical quotes. Those didn't answer anything for me. I did not accept the celibacy thing, and I remained in a relationship with my girlfriend in secret. When I left the seminary, it broke my grandmother's heart, but I went on with my life and earned myself a music degree, so now my work is “play.”

My heavy metal band, Predator, was formed in 2007. The band members were all coincidentally Atheist and humanist champions of reason, so we decided to become a loud voice calling out for change, Atheist unity, and liberation from mythology. We do this in spite of threats we receive via email

and Facebook. When we recorded our first album, *Predator*, it got signed a week later to Arctic Records, and it enjoyed worldwide sales and praise from critics and fans. It was clear that we were having an effect when churches started to send us emails criticizing our song, “Closet Anti-Christ,” even though it's not a Satanic anthem. It is actually about domestic abuse. Our Atheism is very clear in the song “In The Name Of God?” which confronts the atrocities committed by Christians, Jews, Muslims, and others throughout history. A good number of our songs are Atheist anthems that express our views and our desire to help see changes in the world. The title track of our second album, *Born in Blood*, addresses the reason for religion: “You fear death and thus invented god and heaven, there's no emancipation, no one's bled for your salvation.”

Lately, I've become more politically motivated. One of my many issues is the fact that churches and religious organizations in the U.S. do not pay taxes. Those of us who are taxpayers are therefore supporting their nonsense. But it's worth the fight.

When I speak about Atheism, I usually begin with: “Christians believe in Christ because they have been lied to.” I do this because what I was taught as a child were lies, but I believed those lies out of the trust I had for adults. I think if everyone stops to think for a moment what theists are actually saying, they would become Atheists on the spot.

I have debated Christians who really believe the Bible is the inerrant word of god, and most of the time, they don't really know what they are talking about. One of them even told me that science is a form of faith because it is nothing but theories and guesswork.

I have accepted that I will die one day and that death will be the end for me. I don't like it, but none of us have a choice in the matter. There's nothing to support belief in a god, but there's plenty of evidence that proves people invented god. Religious belief is, fundamentally, superstition born of fear, and it was the primitive way to interpret and answer for things before we had science for valid, satisfactory answers. We've come a long way since the days when people believed epilepsy was demonic possession or that thunder was the anger of the gods. All the beliefs that survive today will eventually die away just as Thor, Zeus, Poseidon, and Metztli have.

To find out more about Damien Lee Thor and Predator, visit [PredatorTheBand.com](http://PredatorTheBand.com).

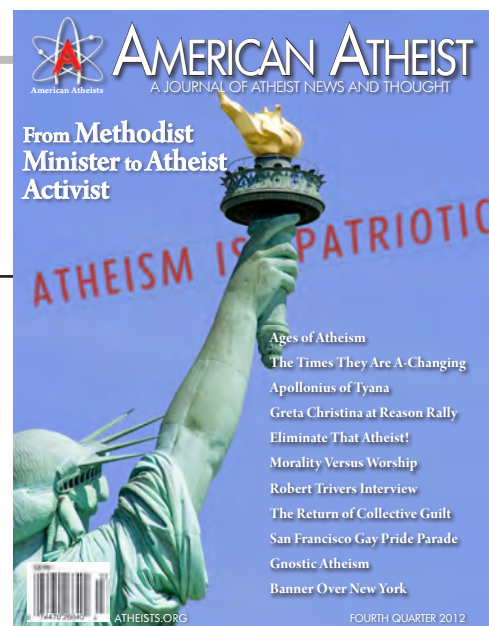
Why are you an Atheist? We are soliciting submissions that answer this question in 800 to 1,000 words. Send them to [PWhissel@Atheists.org](mailto:PWhissel@Atheists.org). Essays may be subject to revision, and publication is at the sole discretion of the Editor-in-Chief.



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